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LEON ROCH

A ROMANCE

BY

B. PEREZ GALDÓS
Author of "Gloria," etc.

2

FROM THE SPANISH BY CLARA BELL

—AUTHORIZED EDITION—

TWO VOLUMES — VOL. II.

REVISED AND CORRECTED IN THE UNITED STATES

NEW YORK
WILLIAM S. GOTTSBERGER, PUBLISHER
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LEON ROCH

LEON ROCH.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

WHICH TREATS OF THE CASTILIAN NOBILITY, OF THE LAWS OF MORALITY, OF ALL THAT IS MOST VENERABLE, AND OTHER SMALL MATTERS.

THE crisis through which the house of Telleria was passing remained unsolved. In fact the catastrophe was so complete that to try to stem it seemed madness; nothing could be done but to conceal it as long as possible. The incorrigible actors in the wretched drama strained every nerve to prolong their reign before abdicating disgracefully and retiring into poverty; and though, behind the scenes, they were forced to soliloquise on the fact that they had no servants, that there was not a shop that would trust them, that they had not the bread of vanity in the form of a carriage, to the world they made it known that they were all ill. The marquis, poor man, suffered terribly from rheumatism; the marquesa — it was most distressing — had sunk

into an alarming state of debility; the whole family were depressed and ailing. They received no one, not even their most intimate friends; they gave no dinners, not even to the hungry; they went nowhere, not even to the most interesting first nights.

At church was the only place where they could appear with such rueful countenances. What can be more edifying than to listen to the counsels of religion, and to shed a tear at the feet of the Mother of Sorrows. Poor Milagros! The parishioners, who saw her come in and go out with a penitent air that was an example to all, paid her woes the tribute they claimed:

"Poor woman! what a trouble her sons have been to her!"

The evening meetings at the Marquesa de San Salomó's, which were the only refuge of the distressed family, were very quiet and consisted of one or two poets, a few handsome women, half a dozen models of piety and a half a dozen hypocrites. Rome was the favourite theme of conversation, and "*l'Univers*" the favourite newspaper; the poets recited verses that exhaled an odour of sanctity, and under the influence of this suffocating literary incense the whole human race was regarded as excommunicated. Gustavo Sudre's speeches were discussed beforehand; reputations were made for youths just come from the seminary: such a one was a St. Paul, such another a St. Ambrose or a Tertulian, or an Origen — in point of talent, of course; in short the evenings at the San Salomó's had that club-like character which is a conspicuous feature of

modern society. Political prejudices have found their way into the drawing-room and make themselves felt in the perfumed atmosphere of the boudoir, and more conspiracies are discussed there than in the barracks.

The marquesa was young, pretty, tall and shapely, though rather faded looking; her manners were pleasant and she patronised poetry, especially when it was of a pious and mystical tone. A sworn foe to materialism and liberalism and all the evils of modern civilisation, she was both elegant and clever, and the hours of the *tertulias* never seemed long; she had the art of spicing with wit and grace the anathemas that fulminated from her drawing-room, and she encouraged in her house and at her table a tone of moderation which was equally agreeable to the patriarchs and the poets. The St. Pauls and St. Ambroses no doubt swore to themselves that asceticism was better to preach than to practise.

The Marquis de San Salomó, a man who would sooner have been sawn in slices than have yielded a jot of his opinions — if indeed he had any — was not a frequent figure at these meetings. He more often went to the theatre, the casino, or other even less mentionable places of amusement. By day he sat in his study and received bull-fighters and all the rabble of the arena, and three-fourths of his conversation consisted of the slang inseparable from the lowest type of sport, and stories of the escapades of his boon companions. He was rich and not only made his wife a handsome allowance for pin-money, but granted her a considerable sum

for religious purposes, so that a current account with Heaven formed part of his regular household expenses. Of his current account with the ladies of the ballet we need not give the particulars.

On the evening of the day when the marquis had been to see Leon Roch at Carabanchel his wife was conversing eagerly with a stiff old gentleman, decorated with the ribbon of some military order; a most innocent, harmless creature in spite of his calling, and one of those soldiers whose existence seems intended to prove that the army is a perfectly inoffensive body of men.

"It is vain to try to comfort me, General," she said. "I am broken hearted! You yourself have said in exquisite verses that a mother's heart is an inexhaustible treasury of endurance; but mine is full to the brim, I can endure no more; it must overflow."

"Then, my dear madam, of what use is your Christian resignation?" asked the son of Mars, with a look of innocence worthy of a cherub all head and wings. "The Lord will vouchsafe unexpected consolations. And María, is she resigned?"

"What else do you expect from that angel? My poor child! You might crucify her and she would not utter a groan. But Heaven always allows its most saintly children to go through the severest trials. She, like my adored Luis, only prays the Lord to take her to Himself; to him He sent physical suffering; to her, mental anguish."

"We see every day," said the general with an ex-

pression of horror that sat very funnily on his babyish face framed in white whiskers, "that scandals, infidelities and wickedness are on the increase. All laws human and divine are less and less respected every day. Where will you find a man of upright character, or a trace of chivalrous honour? Turn where you will there is nothing but effrontery and cynicism! Only picture to yourself, my dear Milagros, what the end must be of a society which, day by day and hour by hour, neglects all the principles of religion. But no! I ought not to say that, for there are still saints and martyrs. Your daughter for instance, deserted by her husband for her very virtues, is by those virtues — by those very virtues let me repeat — a shining example, a light, a standard in the battle."

Yes, that she certainly was. Every group in the room was discussing her. Deserted! and solely for being too good! Such a deed cried to Heaven and clamoured for vengeance — a second deluge, the gulf that yawned to swallow Korah, the fires of Sodom, the flies of Egypt, the sword of Attila — of all these curses the one which seemed most likely to be realised then and there was that of the flies in Egypt, for their buzzing and their sting were not inadequately represented by the spiteful tattle, the commonplace denunciations, and amateur excommunication with which people of a certain way of thinking castigate whatever they disapprove of in their fellow men.

"If the separation had been based on any other pretext," said a poet to a journalist, "it might pass . . .

for it is an obvious fact that Leon. . . ." But their voices were lost in a chorus of comments and tittering. Two old ladies put their noses into the group to inhale the atmosphere of scandal — more fragrant to them than the scent of roses.

"I have suspected it for a long time," said the mistress of the house to a deputy who held the archepiscopal throne in the ultramontane coterie. "Pepa Fúcar is a hussy. But there was never more than a crumb of principle in all the Fúcar household. It does not do to be too particular in the way you make either money or love. There are some families that are fated to it."

"I have no doubt that the connection is one of old standing," replied the deputy, who admired the marquesa's dinners, and who was wont to improve on her slanderous insinuations.

"From what I know now, and from certain dates," added Pilar bowing with a reproachful glance to Gustavo who just then entered the room, "I can positively assert that they are of very old standing." And she continued her remarks in a low tone to the worthy general, who, though fully determined never to be astonished at any wickedness could not conceal his dismay and perplexity.

"Leon's child!" he muttered.

In another part of the room the Marquis de Telleria was enlarging on a new — a perfectly new idea — with a ready flow of hackneyed phrases. This was the theory that we are all monstrously alike; that there are no men of mark left, and that the world is dismally uniform.

He — the marquis — was in fact fast losing faith in the traditional chivalry of the Spanish nation.

"Society is fast rushing on its ruin," the general agreed, "and though some deluded minds refuse to see it, it is none the less certain. You have only to observe one thing, one most significant fact."

Every one turned to look at the speaker, awaiting the announcement, which might have been a declaration of war to judge from the grave truculence of his face.

"Observe, I say, one fact. When there is any scandal, or rumour of a scandal, who gives rise to it? Mark, I say, who gives rise to it. It is always a man devoid of religion; one of those conceited and infatuated beings who dare to despise the Christian faith, and who may be seen every day flaunting their insolence, and lifting their heads to defy the stars."

This speech was received with the silence of grave consent; then a question arose between the deputy and the journalist as to whether Leon sinned from indifference or from perversity.

"There is no doubt of it," said the deputy, "corruption is universal. But while those who cling to the faith are in a position to amend and save their souls, the rationalists are going on straight to ruin. Like Samson, they have pulled the temple about their ears, and, like him, they must perish in the ruins."

Meanwhile Gustavo and the Marquesa de San Salomó were talking together in too low a voice to be overheard.

"You ought — you must," she said. "Tell the whole truth to María."

"The truth? But I cannot trust to appearances. I have not at all made up my mind as to Leon's guilt. Until I have seen him and talked to him I shall say nothing to my sister."

"Then I will."

"No, you will not."

The lady was fractiously eager; she felt as though she could not breathe freely till she had sent the arrow home to her friend's heart.

"But I assure you I will," she said, with dilated nostrils, sparkling eyes and a mounting colour.

"In matters that concern my family the decision must be left to them."

"Oh! I have a voice too in matters which concern your family," said the marquesa with an impertinent accent on the words "your family."

"Never, with my consent," retorted Gustavo, repressing his indignation. He was pale, and his whole expression was that of a man who had worries of his own. Pilar raised her voice.

"Our friend here — the father of his country — tells me that he cannot make his speech to-morrow on the subject of article twenty-two." There was a murmur of dissatisfaction. "The president has allowed him to exchange his turn."

"When will it be then?"

"This sad business of his sister's," she went on,

looking at Gustavo with assumed sympathy. "Has been too much for his brain."

Gustavo went across to where his mother was sitting.

"Compose yourself," she said affectionately, "we are as miserable as you can be, but we have not lost patience."

"Ah well, I have."

"But have you made any effort to verify the truth of this report about Leon," asked the deputy who gave himself the airs of a whole convocation.

"Oh there is no lack of dates. Agustin went to see him to-day... he tried to bring him to a sense of duty...." And the conversation still ran on this absorbing subject till presently the group was diminished by several persons moving off to hear the mistress of the house read an article by Louis Veuillot. Gustavo and his mother went into an adjoining room.

"Is it true that my father went to-day to see Leon?"

"You heard me say so."

"I was afraid that his journey to Carabanchel might have had another object. It would be a fresh disgrace...."

"What nonsense! Disgrace! You are a perfect Don Quixote!"

"Yes," said Gustavo with a glare of wrath in his eyes, "I am afraid he went to throw himself at the feet of our enemy and to beg of him...."

"What shocking things you say! We, we, beg of him!"

"Oh! that would not astonish me; I am accustomed to shocking things. I will go to see Leon and talk to him myself. Who knows but that he may not be so guilty as we think. Horrible lies are invented in the world and it is quite certain that all are not good who are supposed to be. Others on the contrary — if he has really deserted my sister to live with another woman all intercourse between us and him must cease; he must be a stranger to us. Oh! what a shame it is — what misery — to have received from such a man so many favours that we cannot throw back in his teeth!"

"Good heavens! do not speak like that, you will attract attention," cried the marquesa alarmed by her son's vehemence. "You are really absurd!"

"Absurd!" repeated Gustavo bitterly. "What do I care; and after all I am the only one of the family who feels the vileness of our existence."

"Gustavo!"

"I speak for myself, only for myself. This house is as odious to me as my own home. The everlasting babble about morality has deafened me and prevents my hearing the voice of truth — truth, which the more it is felt the less it is talked about. I am equally disgusted with my own part in the world, with the position of my family, and the worldly cynical set who call themselves my friends. I am satisfied with nothing, and the one

thing I hope for, is a voluntary exile that may remove me from all who belong to me."

"And do you wish to add fresh troubles to those I already have to bear?" she said, visibly moved. "You, emigrate, renounce all your future prospects — even the hope of becoming a minister. . . ."

"No, the idea of emigrating is, of course, mere madness; I cannot go. My ambition and my disgrace are one and I am bound to them as the snail is to his shell. Here I must stay — for ever inseparable from my family, my fancy, my class, and my principles!" He accented the last word ironically. "I must live on, seeing what I see, and hearing what I hear. By the way, I have a new disaster to tell you of. This evening Polito was slapped in the face, in a house I need not name, in consequence of a dispute over a game of cards. There was a fight, women screamed—the police interfered. . . ."

"But was he hurt?" asked his mother.

"No — a bruise or two; but the row was heard all down the street — no matter the name of the street;" he groaned and went on: "We live in an evil day, a day of wrath! However, from this time forth I shall insist on managing the affairs of the house, and we shall see whether I can get it out of the present difficulty, and save our credit at any rate — save the honour which is no longer a fact but a fiction. I am deeply vexed that my father should have gone to Leon with the purpose that I suspect."

"It is an absurd suspicion."

"Nay — it is a miracle if I am mistaken. But I will know the truth, for I will see Leon."

"You?"

"Yes I. I must know his guilt from himself. I believe him to be in error, but not in wilful sin; I will talk to him frankly and he will answer me in the same way. If he is such a wretch he will have to confess it... meanwhile be sure you do not let a word of these reports reach Maria's ears."

"Oh! I shall tell her myself; poor child! It would be a pity that she should not know all the virtues of her loving husband! Fancy if a stranger were to tell her, exaggerating or misrepresenting the facts."

"Say nothing about it to her."

"Do not interfere in that matter. I shall, and this very night. You need not teach me my duties as an affectionate and anxious mother; I know perfectly well what I ought to do. María must be informed of everything. How do you know that we may not arrange a reconciliation?"

Gustavo was on the point of replying when their privacy was invaded by a certain poet who was said to be very attentive to the marquesa and one of her favourite followers — a common, clumsy-looking man, but older than he seemed. There was no trace in his features of that lofty refinement which might have entitled him to write, in a dozen different metres, of the perennial founts of gladness and the mystical union of souls, or to proclaim his indignation against those who denied

or ignored the existence of God. It was hard to credit so despicable a person with magnanimity.

"It is admirable, unanswerable!" he exclaimed as he came in.

"What is?"

"Louis Veuillot's article on modern society — on those base and corrupt minds who, to smother their own remorse, wish to abolish faith. Do you want this copy of the *Univers*, Gustavo?"

"You can take it if you will let me have it to-morrow. I have an article to write on the same subject."

They went into the drawing-room.

"Then it is understood we sing to-morrow," said the marquesa to her friend.

"Yes, to-morrow, without fail." There was a rustling of silk dresses, a chorus of: "To-morrow then, to-morrow —" a chirping of kisses and moving of chairs. The company were dispersing. Some left in pairs: some went smiling, others frowning. The Tellerias departed, then the general, and the deputy with his archi episcopal airs; and with him went Gustavo, discussing church politics but without losing his expression of gloom.

"Good-night, Pilar; to-morrow at San Prudencio."

"Good-night — I will take your message to Padre Paoletti."

And when they were all gone the Marquesa de San Salomó retired to pray and to sleep.

CHAPTER II.

A PICTURE WHICH MIGHT BE ZURBARAN BUT IS ONLY BY GOYA.

MARIA DE ROCH was very early at church next morning. For some time past she had accustomed herself to rise early and perform her religious duties so as to return home by nine o'clock, by which plan she avoided meeting the crowd of worshippers who selected the more convenient hours of the day. On this particular day, being Sunday, she was even earlier than usual and came out of church having fulfilled the duties that most flattered her soul; then, as usual, she spent the chief part of the morning in religious reading. But she did not seek mental nourishment in the rich stores of the older mystical literature of Spain — writings purified in the crucible of the loftiest spiritual faith and which are a real feast for the faithful soul, warming it with a divine flame and edifying it with transcendental poetry and morality. María fed her piety, sad to say, on the worst of contemporary religious literature, the outcome, in many cases, of ecclesiastical jobbery — in style a borrowed medley and in substance not really religious at all, but materialistic in its tendencies — which, with newspapers and prayer-books, forms the staple of the booksellers' trade.

Many of these effusions are translated from the French and bear a "made to sell" stamp which is little short of profane. Their covers do not lack the elegance and finish characteristic of good modern workmanship; within lie prose and verse. But what prose! What verse! There are certain ideas which demand simplicity of expression; it is their natural garb, without which they cease to exist; there are others which require dignity and grandeur, and which, lacking these, degenerate into affectation and rhodomontade. María could not appreciate these subtleties; her favourite works were full of "celestial smiles" and "seraphic fires," of "virgin souls" and "airs from Heaven." This sensual terminology appealed to her more directly than any other language; her narrow intelligence would not have understood any other or would have despised it, for her imagination was particularly susceptible to the suggestions of her senses. María admired the character of Santa Teresa because she had been taught to do so, but she could not understand her sublime metaphysics. Seraphic fervour was to her a flow of words or it was nothing. She did not exhaust her brain by trying to conceive of the subtler forms of devotion, nor was she capable of sublime abstractions. Her nature, with its plain common-sense, was coarse, and led her to seek religious fervour by other means. For instance, God's mercy to his creatures was to her a fact beyond dispute, but it only came home to her personally as associated with some relic; the infinite perfection of the Creator, though she believed in it im-

plicitly, was real to her apprehension only through the æsthetic medium of an image. The Virgin Mary, the ideal which of all others most interpenetrates the heart of a woman, did not fail to appeal to hers; but yet in order to feel her influence in full force, to be wrought to enthusiasm or moved to tears, she would steep — or shall I say dilute? her emotions in water from Lourdes.

Enough has been said to show that María's religion was that of the lower orders — meaning by low, incapable of thought and feeling, and leading that mechanical existence of eating, digesting and sleeping, which is the crassest and purest materialism. Vulgarity is not a class distinction; it is an element, a component, a chemical constituent of social geology; if a map could be constructed to show its distribution it would appear as a black stain — a foul deposit — in every stratum of humanity. And thus, just as a few elect spirits represent the aristocracy of mind, María was the representative of vulgar credulity. In other times and under other conditions, without ceasing to profess piety or to pray six hours a day, she would have told fortunes by the cards, have worked witchcraft by means of relics and rosaries, and have mixed up her religious exercises with the tricks and arts of a gipsy.

But these are things of the past, though there are still malignant souls in the world and gipsy arts and wiles, differing, it is true from those of the middle ages. María's aim and end was to belong to every religious society, charitable or otherwise. She was, more es-

pecially, what in the jargon of cant is known as a "*Josephina*," affiliated, that is to say, to a society named after St. Joseph, whose principal object is to send up prayers for the Pope. It includes a large number of highly respectable persons of whom no ridicule is intended. María was a member of various other associations and sisterhoods; nearly all of them have their periodical reports and tracts, intended to consolidate their existence and to supply a form of light literature which is sometimes extraordinarily droll to the outsider. María accepted it all as unctuous and edifying and would spend hours in reading the stories — would that we could reproduce a few of them! — and addresses; and above all the section which may be called "Mystico-pathological:" the list, that is to say, of the cures effected every month by the wafers and ointments dipped in the famous "*Perolito*" of Seville — miracles even greater than those wrought by Holloway and other quacks. María had always by her a store of these medicaments for the benefit of her friends and relations, being absolutely convinced of their efficacy on those who employed them in faith. The "Perolito" could never be a paying concern in any country where common-sense and an efficient police were known. Though María constantly aimed at treading in the footsteps of her brother Luis she was free from his extravagant ecstasy, and her ideas and practice were unlike his in many particulars. Her unhealthy pietism was the outcome of a narrow intellect, and kept alive by her senses and the refractory pride of her nature. Her ideas and

feelings were absolutely foreign to those of her husband, and we have seen what the character of her affection for him was — the only affection of which she was capable — and in her hours of penitential solitude how she had struggled to eradicate even that! What violence she had done to her imagination in trying to see as evil, what was good, as corrupt, what was worthy, as repulsive, what was noble and attractive! She firmly believed that so long as she allowed her mind to dwell on the image of her husband she was no true saint. Was she right or wrong? None can tell but God who, in his omniscience, saw the aspect that image wore.

"If only he were not an atheist!" was her constant thought; and the response was an implacable determination never to have anything in common with such a man. In thought she referred to that brother whose shade would visit her in the lonely watches of the night and it had been his wish — his will — that she and the atheist should live separated; he had pronounced her free from her matrimonial bondage and released her from the burden of earthly duty, that she might henceforth belong solely to God. And now and again she would start from sleep in an agony of distress, her forehead damp with sweat, and trembling in every limb. "And if he loves some other woman!" she would mutter to herself.

Her ideas had taken this turn. She could even bear to think that her husband might die without loving her, but that he should live and love some one else — that he should give to another that which ought to be hers."

—That was her real grief and constant mortification; and when her reflections reached this point her whole being leaped into revolt with an impulse which was the very passion of egotism.

During the period when Leon was gradually becoming estranged from her María took a delight in humiliating him; it was a pleasure to see him come in every evening, ready to receive the lash. Nay, sometimes, from the force of habit and from the sincere regard which he had inspired in her, she was really glad at his coming but she took care to conceal both the gladness and the affection. Merciful Heaven! It would never do to let it be said that she hailed and welcomed the "Atheist." Secretly she took an interest in everything that concerned him, gave orders for his comfort, and if he were ailing, made him take advice and remedies, only taking care not to give him water from the Grotto at Lourdes or wafer from Seville as these are specific only for those who believe in them.

When they talked to each other it cost her a constant effort to keep herself from gazing with pleasure and sympathy on her husband's attractive face, and when she was alone, she repented of her weakness, calling herself reprobate and sensual and imploring her brother in Heaven to aid her by the virtue of certain sacred relics.—"But if only he were not an atheist!" And she would weep at the thought.

When Leon left her once for all, María, who had clenched the matter by declaring that God forbid her to love him, felt utterly crushed; her hearth was vacant

and desolate. She was terrified too — of what? She herself knew not. During one whole night she could not command her mind to a single thought of devotion. She was stunned, but at the same time her brain ached with a swarm of evil visions like the trampling of horses snorting as they charge. She needed much reading and all the counsel and warnings of her spiritual directors before she could fairly bury the fair corpse of her departed happiness; much prayer, much penance, much labour of her fancy to see what she knew to be good and beautiful as evil and hideous. But she was not the first to undertake this odious task of purifying her soul by the instrumentality of the imagination — heaping foulness over the grave of all the joys of love and graces of life; hermits and ascetics had done it before her, and filled up the measure by personal castigation. María laboured in the obscurity of her tortured brain to see the happy days of her honeymoon in the darkest and foulest colours and so threw a lurid light on the sweetest hours of her married life. — It was a frightful revulsion and anarchy of soul.

As has been said, María, when her husband was absent for ever felt a miserable void, anxiety and solitude. Where was he gone? She made various enquiries, but without betraying her disquietude. She profaned even her prayers by thinking of it — San Antonio! but this man was hers — her husband and should belong to no one else!

Logic of this kind comes with fulminating force sometimes to a half-demented brain; and the strange

thing was that in spite of what she choose to call Leon's atheism, she had always recognised in him a basis of honourable feeling in which she had perfect confidence. Still, so narrow was her apprehension, that she had never thought of setting that magnanimity against his disbelief. Why did she trust the honour of an atheist? She did not know, but that she did was beyond dispute. Now, when her husband, her mate, her companion, had left her, she was bereft of all trust. María was going through a strange experience. It seemed to be close to her, a monstrous and hideous presence that gazed at her, that haunted her, that glided with a cold and slimy touch up the pleats of her dress, looked into her heart with its wicked black eyes, poked in its taper head, and then drew in its long writhing body to the very tip of its slender tail — curled itself up in her heart where it lay coiled, radiating an intolerable heat but as still and motionless as death in the nest that it had made there.

CHAPTER III.

THE REVOLUTION.

THE Marquesa de San Solomó was talking to María.

"My dear friend," she began, "I would not be the last to come and condole with you."

"To pray with me?"

"Yes, to pray; but also to sympathise. I did not see you in church. Padre Paoletti told me that you had come and gone early; and I quite understood it. I long to talk to you and comfort you. . . ."

"Comfort me?" said María much puzzled, "for my loneliness, my solitude . . . but I have suffered long in silence, and the Lord has not denied me sweet consolation. What are we here for but to suffer? We have only to get that well into our minds and then no grief can find us unprepared."

"Oh!" cried Pilar with eager admiration and kissing her friend, "how good you are! What a saint! What a beautiful exception in this wretched world! Folks ought to come and worship you and pray to you as much as if you were canonized."

"No, no, you are wrong, very wrong. What if I were to tell you that I am dreadfully wicked?"

"You, wicked! you?" said Pilar looking as horrified as if the idea were rank blasphemy. "And if you

are a sinner what am I? Tell me that. . . . What am I?" and she answered the question herself with a deep and prolonged sigh, the pathetic expression of a conscience that was too heavily laden. "It would be a marvel to me that there should be any saints, even if the occasions of sin were rare, and half the world lived in convents or in caves, setting each other a good example; but now, when liberty has multiplied the opportunities of vice, and every one does as he pleases, and there is hardly any one to set a worthy example, it is miraculous. That is why I say that you ought to be canonized; for in Madrid, which is beyond a doubt the wickedest place under the sun — and in this century which, as Padre Paoletti says, is the opprobrium of the ages — you have been able to defy the temptations of the world and are worthy to be compared with the penitents, and confessors, and even the martyrs of the Church." She emphasised the last words with marked meaning.

"Oh! do not speak so," said María, who though she liked flattery was wont to conceal the fact.

"My dear, I think you admirable, wonderful," added her friend with affectionate rapture. "For I am miles behind you though I long to be like you. Would that Heaven might grant me to take a single step alone and unhindered in the path of perfection in which you are treading, and on which I have not even started! Do you know what I should like? To be constantly with you, to go to pray with you, if you would allow it, to read what you read, to think as you think; and see

whether in that way I should feel better inspired. For the present I will only ask you to give me something belonging to you — anything, a handkerchief for instance, that I may always wear it in my bosom as if it were a relic. I want always to touch something that you have touched. I would never be without it, because when I see your handkerchief it will remind me of you and of your goodness, and that will help me to conquer an evil thought or a bad impulse. Admire you? And ought I not admire you, dear angel? Indeed, *ma petite*, you do not know your own value. You will see, when you die people will fight for pieces of your garments."

"Pilar, you are offending Heaven by your adulation!"

"It is only that you are so good that you do not like to hear it. Your brother in glory was just the same, but you are better than he."

"Pilar, for God's sake!" cried María, now really horrified.

"Yes, and greater than he; I say so. He was a saint but you are a martyr as well. You have reached the climax of Christian heroism. I know no living creature to compare with you, and I do not know whether to admire or to pity you most."

María did not understand her.

"The name of saint seems to me too weak — and what name of horror can I give to the man who, having in his house such a treasure of goodness and piety, abandoned it, despised it and covered himself

with ignominy by scorning gold for base metal, and filling the place of the angel Heaven had granted him for a wife with a. . . ."

"Pilar! Good God! Are you speaking of my husband?"

"Oh, my dearest friend," said the marquesa, colouring with excitement, "forgive me for being furious as I speak of it. I really cannot help it!"

"But Leon. . . . Pilar, you do not know what you are saying; my husband is a strictly moral man."

It has been said that María was a woman of limited intellect though of fairly strong feelings; her nature lacked delicacy and refinement, but, at the same time, what was best in her was a basis of loyalty and honour and a vein of innate rectitude which is always accompanied by a certain confidence in the honesty of others. Her friend's reticent insinuations aroused her indignation.

"I see," said Pilar, "that I have been very rash and indiscreet. You have heard nothing."

"I have heard nothing? What about?"

"Oh! I cannot tell you; I ought to have held my tongue. I thought that your mother. . . ."

"Speak out — you mentioned my husband. . . ."

"And now I am sorry for it."

"Then my husband — then you mean to say — he believes in nothing — there is no hope for his soul — he is an atheist, an infidel . . . but he is perfectly well conducted and blameless in his life. . . ."

Pilar suddenly burst out laughing; her loud and impertinent mirth, lasting for some seconds, disturbed María beyond measure.

"If you call it blameless to desert his wife, who is a saint, and live with another. . ." said her friend, in a sharp rough tone like that of a file on metal. María turned as pale as death, her eyes staring and her lips parted.

"With another!" The idea was not a new one, but the fact was a shock. She had anticipated the revelation by vague and timid suspicions; but a sad truth startles us even when it has been foreseen in a terrible dream. "With another, you said?"

"Yes, with another. All Madrid knows it but you."

"You said — with another . . ." repeated María, who had half lost her wits and stood stunned and paralysed as though those two terrible words were a mass of stone that had fallen on her head.

"Yes, with another," said Pilar, with another burst of laughter, which did not argue any very great reverence for the saint of her adoration.

"And who is it?" asked María with a flash of vehemence, her bewilderment suddenly changed to passionate excitement. "Who, I say, who?"

"I thought you knew, poor martyr! It is Pepa Fúcar, the daughter of the Marquis de Fúcar; the man whom all the papers call 'the eminent Fúcar,' because he has made a fortune by paving streets, laying down railroads, poisoning the country with

his tobacco — which is made they say of dead leaves swept off the roads, and finally lending money to the government during the war, at two hundred per cent; a specimen man of the century, with a Haytian title; a product of parliamentary influence and work done by contract. He cannot bear the sight of me because, one evening at the Rioponces', he began paying me compliments and I turned my back on him, and whenever I see him within hearing in a drawing-room I begin talking of the adulteration of tobacco, of the increase of asphalt pavements, of the nuisance of gas, and of the shoes with brown paper soles that he supplied to the troops." And Pilar laughed sharply for the third time.

But María had not listened to her spiteful sketch of the Marquis de Fúcar. She heard nothing but the tumult in her own soul, the storm of a rebellion, of a revolution, like the stormy rousing of a sleeping crowd. The serpent that lay brooding in her heart suddenly brought forth a swarm of others that started into life, alert and vicious, gnawing, and vomiting fire. Her jealousy took the form of a legion of invisible reptiles, stinging and scorching her on every side; this was in fact the guise under which it presented itself to her imagination, which always conceived of mental experiences as analogous to physical sensations; to her a pleasure was actually a caress, and a pain a blow or a pinch or a stab. The poor saint and martyr had never in her life before felt anything like this, and she did not know what it meant. Her grief was compounded with

terror and surprise, and the shock was so great that she forgot to turn to God, as might have seemed natural, or to pray for patience or resignation.

What was this? It was the Real suppressing the Artificial; the woman's heart asserting its supremacy through the agency of a revolt of its imprisoned, but genuine, emotions. It was an entire revolution of woman's nature claiming its rights, and throwing off all that was false and assumed to raise the triumphant standard of truth and of that nobler part which — whether she be lover, wife, or mother, good or bad — makes her a true woman; makes her the other half of man — the Eve to Adam — whether faithful or faithless, a heroine or a baggage. This revolution is sometimes occasioned by the passion of love; but not invariably, because love in its innocent simplicity yields to the sophistries and treacherous blandishments of its brother mysticism. What never fails to stir it up is the brutal and overwhelming passion of jealousy, so well painted by Calderon as the hydra whose double nature, diabolical and seraphical, betrays its birth as the hybrid offspring of Love, which is divine, and Envy, the daughter of all the devils. The sudden frenzy that had sprung up in María's soul was more akin to its mother Envy than to its father Love. It was an instrument of torture and torment, a rack without respite, a fire that grew fiercer each instant. Her bigotry was suddenly shattered like a tower that has been undermined and blown to the winds. At that moment her soul was dark; God utterly eclipsed. With a cry of anguish and clasping her

head in her hands she exclaimed: "Wretch! But you shall pay dearly for it!"

Just at this juncture her mother entered the room and perceiving that María had learnt all, she threw herself into her arms. María had no tears; her eyes were dry and sparkling. The marquesa puckered her face up to shed a tear she had ready, as we are prepared with sighs as we enter the house of death.

"Do not suppress your grief, my darling child. I see you know the worst. I would not have told you for fear of agitating your tender soul . . . be calm. Pilar has told you? It is horrible, atrocious! but perhaps not irremediable . . . For days I have been miserable; but be calm; let me see you resigned."

Pilar thought it was her turn to speak again.

"The atrocity," she said, "is all the greater under the circumstances. It is a villainous thing to betray any woman, but a saint like you . . . What is society coming to? In its passion for abolishing it will at last abolish the soul! Oh! *c'est dégoutant!* and then the wretches wonder that a handful of brave men stand forth, determined that God shall not be pensioned off. They are furious because a standard is raised to rally those who are ready to do battle for Religion, the Mother of Duty. If they are conquered through treachery, which nowadays triumphs everywhere, they will return to the charge . . . they will return again and again, till at last. . ."

As she spoke she had risen, and was now standing in front of a mirror that formed the door of a wardrobe

and contemplating her interesting person, twisting from side to side to study the fall of her elegant mantle and the effect of her fashionable hat. Her dainty, ungloved hands arranged here a pleat and there a curl; and then she returned to her seat.

"Did you hear that he is living there?" said the marquesa to her daughter and softening the words with a kiss.

"With her?" cried María drawing aside from her mother's embrace. "Where?"

"At Carabanchel. Leon was so reckless as to take a lodging close to Suertebella. There is a way through the park."

"I will go there," said María, rising and pulling violently at the bell.

"My dear, be calm. You must not take it so."

A maid answered the bell and María said: "My black dress."

"Your black merino frock!" exclaimed her mother. "A pretty object you will look! No, no, if you go at all — and we will talk of that — you must dress as well and look as handsome and as nice as possible."

"Oh dear!" cried María regretfully. "I have no gowns; nothing pretty or nice; I have given all my good things away."

"And you think you can go in that merino rag? Foolish child! how little you know of men. Very well; go to find your husband a perfect guy, and you will see how much he cares. Nay, appearances rule the world."

"But first let us decide whether you had better go at all," suggested Pilar.

"Yes, I want to go... I want to go," María insisted, clasping her hands, and her eyes glared with fury.

"No tragedies, no scenes — eh?"

"I do not think it is safe for you to go there. If he were to offer you some grosser insult, if you were to meet Pepa face to face, or her child — supposing that the child is in its father's arms — for they say he is devoted to it..."

"Its father?" said María. "Why Federico is dead?"

"No, no," said her friend, with the expression of cruel resolve that she might have put on while thrusting a needle through some wretched insect to add it to a collection. "No, do you not see? Your husband..."

"Leon... my husband... Monina's father!" exclaimed the poor woman. The fresh blow stunned her as the first had done.

"So the people choose to say," said Milagros trying to soften the shock.

"And you, Mamma, what do you think? Is it true?" asked María with great anxiety.

These two women were not malicious; their state of mind — analogous to that state of the body which is known to physicians as cachexy — was the result of a lack of sound principle from moral impoverishment, a disease caused by the life they led and the constant in-

fection of an atmosphere full of deceptions and scandal. Still, there was something in them that made them revolt at their own cruelty; horrified at the depth and bitterness of the cup they had put to María's lips, they now attempted to qualify it.

"No, I believe it is a fable."

"No, I believe. . ." But Pilar, who was less generous than her friend, did not finish her sentence.

"The idea arose," she added, "from a certain likeness. . ."

"In Monina?"

"To Leon — I do not know what to think. It seems to me beyond a doubt that the connection is of old standing."

María bounced from her chair; there is no other word for that spring, like a stag's when wounded in his sleep, and she rushed to seize the black merino gown in order to start at once.

"Do not be precipitate, do not be rash," said her mother, detaining her. "You cannot go at this time of day. It is quite dusk."

"What does that matter?"

"No, you really must not."

The evening had in fact come down on them and the room was almost dark. "Lights — bring lights!" cried María, "I cannot bear this gloom."

"I think that you ought to go," her mother went on; "but not to-night, to-morrow."

"Marquesa, have you fully considered the step?"

asked her friend. "Will it not be a humiliation; would not silent contempt be more dignified?"

"Oh!" said the affectionate and anxious mother; "I even hope for a reconciliation."

In truth her hopes were small, but it was what she most ardently desired.

"A reconciliation! what madness! And you, María, do you believe in a reconciliation?"

"I, I do not know, I cannot tell," said María, helpless to answer that or any other question. "I do not ask for reconciliation but for punishment."

"Oh! my dear, we are not acting a melodrama," cried the marquesa spreading out her hands with the affected solemnity of a white-robed priest on the opera stage. "Peace, peace! be calm María; yes you must go, and go dressed like other folks. That smell of dyed woollen . . . pah! it is intolerable."

The two marquesas laughed at the jest, while Pilar threw the objectionable garment aside. María glanced at it revengefully as much as to say: "Why are you not silk, and well made, and fashionable?"

For the first time since she had renounced worldly things the plain uniform of sanctity, which yesterday she would not have exchanged for royal robes, struck her as ugly.

"The question of dress will be easily solved," said Pilar, "you and I are much alike in figure; I will bring some of my gowns for you to choose from."

"And a mantle?"

"Yes, and a hat."

"At what time will you start?"

"At once."

"No, to-morrow at noon," said the mother, "we must not neglect the proprieties — the proper time and opportunity."

"I must go home to dinner, and I will return afterwards," said Pilar. "I will bring you what I have that is most suitable, for you to choose from. We will make you quite beautiful. The worst thing that could happen would be for Pepa Fúcar to laugh at you for fun. I shall be back again in an hour and a half; we have no one coming to see us this evening, and my husband is dining out with Higadillos and some other bull-fighters, and a couple of deputies. *Au revoir*, my dear — good-night, Milagros." She kissed them both and disappeared.

During her absence the marquesa eat a little dinner; María none, though there was no fast enjoined by the church almanac. Pilar by-and-bye returned with a carriage-load of elegant raiment — beautiful dresses, mantles, parasols, hats; and that nothing might be wanting she even brought boots of the latest make and silk stockings *haute nouveauté*. This was the sack-cloth worn by this coquettish votary of the faith!

The servants and the maid brought everything up and the sofas and chairs were covered. Pilar, who was a capital show-woman told them to place this gown here, and that hat there, so as to display them to the best advantage. María sat gazing seriously enough at the gay colours, the wonderful shapes and whimsical

decorations devised by French milliners. She looked, but she did not seem to see.

"Well what do you think? Which dress will you wear?"

"This is pretty," said María pointing at one at random. "Who made it for you?" And then again she sat gloomily staring before her. She was like a reveller who has been long absent and is astonished to find the fashions changed.

"What a tight shape!" she said.

"This pearl-grey will suit you."

"No, I would rather wear black," she said.

"That black corded silk with pale straw colour. That suits you to perfection; I admire your taste though the season is not far advanced it is hot. Which hat will you have?"

María looked at three hats that Pilar displayed. After long meditation she said: "That black one with — what do you call that colour — cream? and the bird is pretty too with those pale roses."

"Ah!" exclaimed Pilar admiringly, "if you had not given up the world for more than a single day you could not do better. How well you have chosen. Very well, now you shall try them on. We must see if the gown fits you; it can be taken in, or let out; I brought my maid, and between us. . ."

Before María could say a word her mother, Pilar, and the maid had begun to divest her of the coarse grey flannel dress which looked like the gown of some

poverty-stricken priestling. But at this proceeding María felt a slight reaction.

"Mercy!" she cried, "what are you doing?"

"Silly, silly child," said the marquesa, "even at such a crisis can you not forget the follies of your exaggerated devotion?"

María allowed herself to be led into the next room and in front of a looking-glass; but the mirror was covered with a black curtain and looked more like a catafalque. They pulled it aside, and in the glass was born, as one might say, the charming image of María Sudre — a sudden creation as it seemed in her eyes.

"Good Heavens!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands, "how thin I am!"

"Yes a little fallen away, but prettier, much prettier than ever," said her mother enthusiastically.

"Lovely, *charmante!* . . . Juana, come and dress this hair," said Pilar to the maid, who was famous as a hair-dresser.

"Be clever now; something simple. Just a knot that we may judge of the effect of the hat."

Juana quickly unfastened María's plaits to begin her work, while María, after looking at herself for a few minutes, fixed her eyes on her lap and seemed to be praying in silence. She had seen her marble shoulders and snowy throat and the sight had filled her with conscientious alarms. Perhaps the reaction might have spurred her to resistance. If an arrow shot from her mother's well-aimed bow had not diverted her thoughts.

"When I look at you, my darling, it is incredible to me how that red-haired Pepa Fúcar. . ."

María's jealousy started her into life again as a jaded horse is roused by the spur. Her eyes flashed as they saw themselves in the glass. "How lovely God has made us!" they seemed to say. She turned her head from side to side, looking out of the corner of her eye to see as much as she could of her profile. Yes, it was a fair vision! her paleness was becoming; she might have been taken for a convalescent love-sick angel.

In no time at all Juana had dressed her hair high, so perfectly becoming to María's face and shape that the most famous coiffeur could have done no better; it was hailed with an exclamation of surprise, and María herself gazed in admiration, though she could not smile. Then, having induced her to return to the room where stood a large pier glass, they dressed her in a long princess gown, not an easy operation now that her hair was done.

"Oh! how handsome she is! odious creature," cried the owner of the garment with a pinch of envy. "Now the mantle; we will try this cashmere wrap with embroidery and a fringe. It was made by a disciple of Worth's."

María obeyed blindly, allowing herself to be dressed, watching the process in the glass with anxious eyes, and involuntarily giving herself the moods and attitudes which were needed. The maid held up the light to show the charming picture.

"Now for the hat!"

This was the finishing touch, and Pilar would trust no hands but her own with the delicate task. It was like crowning a queen. She lifted the hat and placed it carefully on her friend's head. What a result! what a success! what a triumph of the æsthetic arts! María was dressed. Complete and perfect in fashion and style! A fashion plate of flesh! Indeed, as she stood, she seemed the ideal and type of good taste; of that perfection of dress combined with the perfection of beauty which produce those distracting charms to which the prudence, the dignity, and sometimes the wealth and salvation of men are sacrificed. Alas! poor Adam! to think that there was a time when for full-dress you had only to pluck a leaf from the first fig-tree!

"Now I am going," said Pilar. "I have seen the effect; to-morrow I will come back and dress you myself. I leave you everything complete: shoes, stockings — look what pretty ones — take the blue pair. Will my shoes fit you? I think so. Here are a pair of high boots and a pair of shoes . . . I have even brought you gloves, for, if I am not mistaken, you have none. — Good-bye till to-morrow."

She kissed her noisily and whispered in her ear: "To-morrow will be a day of trial for you. I will order tapers to be lighted before the Holy Picture in San Prudencio — but the Lord will uphold you, poor dear saint and martyr! By the way, my dear, the ceremony at San Lucas' to-day had all that aspect — that veneer, so to speak — of vulgar display that sticks to everything that Antoñita de Rosafría takes in hand.

You should have seen the hangings and the flags! It was like a political demonstration. If they had struck up Riego's hymn, I should not have been astonished. And, oh, my dear, what a sermon! You should hear that man's squeaky voice! As for edification! — Well, I must not stay any longer; it is growing late. Good-bye. But one thing strikes me: shall I have tapers lighted before Our Lady of Sorrows?"

"Yes," said María eagerly, "Our lady of Sorrows."

"Good-bye Milagros; to-night I have my place at the opera; I shall be in time for two acts of The Huguenots. . . . To-morrow then, at noon."

"At noon, and bring Juana — I will bring my dressing-case, for in this house there is not even a powder puff."

"Good-night — good-night."

CHAPTER IV.

SUING OR DEFIANT?

THE marquesa begged her daughter to go to bed, and María gladly obeyed, for she was very weary. She slowly divested herself of the handsome garments which had so unexpectedly resuscitated the beautiful young woman she had once been, and retired to her alcove. She was shivering with cold and had sunk into a fit of deep melancholy. After a long silence, during which she lay watching her mother with anxious eyes, she turned her face to the images, pictures, and relics which made her alcove a sort of oratory, and began to pray. The marquesa, who could also on great occasions make a due display of fervour, knelt kissing the feet of a crucifix.

"Give me my rosary, mamma," said María; and the marquesa took her the beads which hung at the foot of the cross.

"Now you can leave me," said her daughter. "I am sleepy, and when I have said my prayers I shall fall asleep."

The marquesa fixed the hour at which they were to set out next day. It was agreed that they should both go and that the mother should remain in the carriage while María went in to see her husband.

"My heart tells me that we shall do great things,

perhaps effect a reconciliation," said the marquesa, kissing her daughter. "Now go to sleep and do not worry yourself with matters of conscience. You see the consequences of your obstinacy; honestly, my dear child, I put myself in a husband's place — any husband's; it is not that I wish to blame devotion, true devotion. Am not I a pious and sincere Catholic, though an unworthy one? Do I fail in my religious exercise? You should have thought of this mania for sanctity before you married and took up other duties."

"One thing strikes me," said María, showing clearly that she was not worrying herself about matters of conscience, "I ought to have some jewelry to-morrow — a brooch, bracelets, earrings — you can bring me anything you think proper out of the case I gave you to take care of."

"Very well," said her mother with some embarrassment. "But almost all your trinkets wanted mending — I sent them to Ansorena. But I will see . . ."

"Rafaela tells me that you took away all the plate yesterday."

"Yes, all of it. My dear child, I am always in a fright at your living alone in this great house. There are so many robberies."

"I do not want the plate — but tell me, did you not take the silk curtains too, and my lace, and the inlaid ink-stand and card case — oh! and those two vases, and the Sêvres jars, and the fan painted by Zamacois and the water-colour by Fortuny, and several other things?"

"You have a remarkably good memory," said the marquesa, laughing to conceal her annoyance. "Yes, I took them away. Such treasures ought not to be left in danger of robbery. Do you know that Madrid is swarming with burglars?"

"Then bring me my watch," said María turning over in bed, "I had better know the time to a minute."

"Very well—but I remember it is gone to be mended. It did not go."

"Then I must do without it; good-night, mamma."

"To-morrow at ten. I will be here in time to dress you. Good-night, my darling."

But María could not sleep. For the first time in her life she realised one of her earliest dreams of pious mortification; she had imagined the possibility of lying on a bed of brambles, so that her body being tormented to the great edification of the soul, she might the better emulate the penitent saints whose lives she had read with such enthusiasm. That night her bed was a bed of thorns, till it became a bed of burning coals, and seemed to scorch her limbs. She felt like St. Laurence on his gridiron, or St. John in his cauldron; she could generally get to sleep by repeating her prayers, but to-night they hung buzzing on her lips, like bees at the door of a hive, while her brain seemed on fire, writhing like some soul in the depths of hell, nipped and stung by Satan's ministers. She could bear it no longer; in her ears was a continual hissing like frying; it bewildered her brain; her very eyes ached in the dark. She sprang out of bed and struck a light.

"Now," she said to herself, as she slipped some clothes on. "Now, this minute!"

Without stopping to put on her shoes and stockings she went to look at the clock in her boudoir, her heart sank when she saw that it only marked one. Still so early! She calculated how long it would be till sunrise; then she shut herself into her boudoir. Who can tell what she did there? In the silence of the night and of empty rooms the clocks, with their regular ticking, like breathing, seem to live and watch. Perched on the chimney-shelves, these bronze personages, with faces like masks with twelve eyes, would make us believe that they can hear and understand by the same internal organs which produce that ceaseless and rythmical beat. The clock in María's boudoir was the only witness to her proceedings; the portrait of Leon even knew nothing about them, for it hung with its face to the wall. The clock heard her, then, as she opened and shut various trunks; heard the pleasant splash of water as it flowed into the marble bath and over the rounded limbs of a human statue, dancing and rippling like the waters of a fountain in which alabaster tritons and nymphs disport themselves among translucent jets, cascades, and clouds of spray. The impudent rogue of a clock chuckled to itself as it steadily snapped its hundred teeth; it was long since it had heard such music. Then it smelt the faint, sweet savour of perfumes — it was long since that scent had been used there.

María returned to the boudoir carrying the light with her, and her first glance was at the dial near

which she placed the candle. A quarter past two. Oh, what a bore is a clock that insists on telling you that it is very early! She had wrapped herself in an ample white sheet like a cloak, which helped to produce a reaction after the cold bath; her face was a little blue, but none the less charming, and her small hands clutched the wrapper to gather it round her, as a dove folds her grey wings over her white breast. The reaction from cold water is rapid and complete. She soon felt warm again, and then, as the reversed portrait caught her eye, she raised her arms to take it down — but it was too high. She mounted on a chair to reach it, and we have it on the authority of the clock that his mistress in her light attire was a charming figure which he opened his twelve eyes wide to gaze at.

María unhooked the portrait and, turning it round, set it upon a chair. There, as if he were present in the flesh, were the manly bust, the clever head, the deep honest eyes of Leon Roch; it was like the sudden entrance of a living person. María was strangely startled; all her blood rushed to her heart, leaving her veins empty and chill; breathless and rigid, she looked at the picture as though it were the apparition of some one long dead, or the embodiment of a face in a dream. It did not frown at her but gazed with a serene and kind expression — the natural expression of a warm and loyal nature. María stooped forward; her face was close to the portrait — then she drew back; with her hand she wiped off a little dust, and having done

this, she kissed her husband — once, twice, thrice, on different parts of his face. At that instant she heard a dull, smothered chuckle — it was the clock, taking a deeper breath with the hoarse effort that is preparatory to its striking.

Three o'clock! the creature was growing more amiable and was getting the better of its mania for asserting that it was early. The house, as has been said, was on the outskirts of the city, and she could hear the cocks crowing to proclaim the end of this miserable, dreary, never-ending night.

"It will soon be day," thought María. "As soon as it is day I will set out."

Then she proceeded to dress. All the things that Pilar had brought were lying on the chairs, and, but that there were on the walls three several pictures of St. Joseph, the room might have been taken for that of a woman of the world after a night of dissipation.

María examined the colours of the silk stockings and finally selected the blue pair which she pulled over the rosy feet. Shoes were a more difficult matter; she tried the boots and shoes — happily her friend's foot seemed to be the twin brother to her own — but she doubted as to the particular pair — boots or shoes? A question as important as the greater alternative: Heaven or Hell?

After much hesitation the boots were definitely discarded and she decided on the shoes — high shoes of bronze kid, Louis XV. shape, and embroidered with steel — gems in their way. María looked at them for

a long time and then put them on. She had very pretty feet — prettiest of all when bare — still, she must have shoes on as a social necessity, though it was not *de rigeur* in the days of Venus; and María looked down with satisfaction at the artificial beauties of feet with which not Daphne herself could have run, but which, nevertheless, were pretty enough to behold. She placed her foot firmly on the ground, contemplating the ankle; she turned on her heel and moved the pointed toe, almost like a thimble; the foot as well as the face has an expression of its own. María was satisfied and gave her mind to other matters.

Stays; coiffure; two important matters which could not be attended to together. The first is sometimes a question of strength; the second a sublime work of art. María began with the more serious matter, and it needed no hydraulic pressure to imprison her slender waist. The hair-dressing was a greater difficulty. She seated herself at the dressing-table in a meditative attitude, with her hands raised like a priest who pauses to pray before touching some sacred object, and at length, after various attempts she succeeded in restoring to some extent the structure that Juana had achieved the previous evening — a perfectly simple knot, as it had to be in the absence of various articles of the toilet. But it was becoming, and that was the main point. No puffs or padding.

The rest of her toilet was on the lines of last night's rehearsal: the black silk dress, with its linings and trimmings of straw colour; the hat, which might have been

the creation of fairy hands. . . . Nothing could be better or more bewitching. María gazed at herself in astonishment; she was a different woman! It could not be she who was so beautiful. It was magic. Nay, a good Catholic could not believe in magic! It was a special mercy of Heaven, a providential interposition, to enable her to carry out a meritorious purpose. It could be none other than God who had lent her such exceptional beauty and such brilliant and becoming attire. Superstition clung to her soul as a limpet sticks by suction to a rock.

"God consents, it is God's will —" she said to herself, eagerly seizing on the idea.

Then she looked at herself once more — in front, in profile — yes, she looked well. How slender and well-formed she was, how gracefully her head was poised on her shoulders! The misty veil slightly shaded her pale face, as it might be the shadow of a bird flying by and pausing to admire so sweet a picture. There was a sort of symbolical passion in the depths of the black velvet with lights of straw-coloured silk; in that sombre nimbus with sulphurous gleams framing her delicate complexion there was a perfect harmony; and in those melancholy sea-blue eyes, that looked as if a threat lurked under their sadness, a revenge under their pain, under their tenderness a dagger.

"Gloves!" she exclaimed, "where are they? How provoking if Pilar should have forgotten to leave them."

She found them however, and put them on.

"I have no trinkets, but that is of no consequence

— I have my virtue," she added to herself, "that is the only thing that really matters."

After another glance in the mirror she went on: "Yes, I am handsome — if only I can say just what I feel. . . . If I can find the right words. . . ."

She pulled the bell, startling all the household. The servants were some time getting up, but at last they appeared. Her maid, who came sleepy and stupid into her room, was astounded at seeing her mistress ready dressed — and so beautifully dressed! María desired her to send Señor Pomares to her at once. The worthy man, who had been recalled after Leon's departure, presently made his appearance, with a puffy, stupid face and tottering with the bewildered air of a man who has been roused from his deepest and sweetest slumbers. But María did not look at him.

"Order the carriage to be got ready at once," she said. The steward looked blank with astonishment.

"But — you forget," he said, "you forget. . . .?"

"What?"

"That the carriage is gone."

"To be sure, very true," said María. "I had forgotten. Well, send for a hired carriage, a landau."

"At this hour?"

"Is it not daylight?"

"Dawn is only just breaking."

"What has that to do with it? It seems to me that you want to make difficulties . . . you are of no use at all — "

Pomares was dumbfounded. So hasty . . . so violent. . . . His mistress must be mad.

"Well, why do you not stir, in Heavens name?" she exclaimed, "why do you stand staring at me? A carriage, and at once, at any cost!"

"Very good, Señora; I will go and see."

"At once; as quickly as possible. I want to be off as soon as it is light."

After infinite trouble Pomares, dragging his weary limbs from one place to another, succeeded in hiring a carriage; but not till the day was somewhat far advanced. María, burning with impatience, waited in her room. She took a cup of black coffee, and then alternately paced the room and paused to pray, or sat sunk in thought.

When at length the landau was announced she started up, and going straight to a pretty little cupboard she took out a bottle of not remarkably pure water. Her lips moved, muttering no doubt a prayer, while she poured part of the contents into a silver cup; then, carefully lifting her veil she drank that water which was from the sacred Grotto at Lourdes.

CHAPTER V.

THE ICE GIVES WAY.

MARIA had not gone more than half a mile when a terrible reflection occurred to her — a thought at once so serious and so obvious that she was on the point of turning back. It struck her that her dress, having been chosen with a view to an afternoon drive, was unsuitable for so early a visit — nay, ridiculous not to say "loud." How could she have overlooked this when she was dressing? Why had she not chosen other and simpler things, more suitable according to all the accepted laws of society for morning wear? She was really upset and distressed; however, there was now no remedy; so, though she was vexed to think that on such an occasion she should not be a model of good taste, she consoled herself with the reflection that beauty lays down the laws of fashion and has never been its slave. Other and more important matters soon put all thoughts of dress out of her head. As she drove along she tried to compose and remember appropriate phrases and speeches. She knew exactly what her husband would say, and how she, as the outraged wife, ought to reply. Sentence after sentence surged up in her brain as readily as if it were the crucible of the Spanish Academy. Now and then an adjective seemed too weak and she

substituted a stronger one; here and there a statement of fact gave way to a hypothesis; and thus anticipating the utterance of her wrath and injuries, she grew so excited that she spoke aloud to herself.

She paid no heed to the road along which she was being carried, nor to any object she passed. At the same time, as frequently happens when the mind is full of a fixed group of ideas, María, while she took no conscious note of the more important details, involuntarily absorbed certain trivial and minute ones. She observed a dead bird lying by the road, and a tavern sign-board in which the letter A was missing; as she passed the tram-car she perceived that the driver was blind of one eye. This is one of the commonest and oddest of mental phenomena.

At length she reached the hamlet, or rather detached suburb — neither town nor country, but an irregular medley of mansions and dung-hills. Not knowing precisely which way to go, she enquired of some women who civilly directed her; the man drove on. Now she was near the house — it must be quite close. Her heart throbbed wildly, and all the speeches she had so laboriously prepared deserted her at once.

The carriage stopped . . . she could hardly stand. She saw a gate leading into a large court-yard, full of furniture cases, and an iron bed packed for moving. There was a woman too, talking to some one she could not see. María went in and approached her; then, to her horror, she saw that she was talking to herself; was she mad? But María asked for Don Leon Roch.

"Don Leon Roch?" said Facunda with a good-humoured smile after a pause of astonishment. "He is up there." And she pointed to a door through which a staircase was visible.

María hurried up, but about half way she was forced to stop for breath. At the top she went into a large light room; there was no one there.

She saw books, articles of furniture that she recognised, all in confusion as packed for removal, but no one . . . no one.

Suddenly, like a bird that hops out of a hedge at the sound of a voice, a little girl appeared from behind a table. She held a broken doll and was eating a piece of bread. She was warmly wrapped up, and on her head she wore a little white hood, very much like a nun's. Her face was that of a cherub, if a cherub can be supposed to have a little wet nose from a cold sharp morning. Monina fixed her eyes on the dazzling vision that had suddenly appeared in the doorway and stared at it speechless and motionless. This was not a lady; it was a doll, a very large doll dressed like a lady, and the child's astonishment soon changed to alarm. She saw the figure come slowly towards her without taking her eyes off her . . . and such eyes! Monina turned white and would have cried out but she was too frightened. This enormous doll came slowly up to her without seeming to walk, and when it had reached her it stooped down . . . the poor little thing was too much terrified to scream; those eyes had turned her to stone. It put out a hand and laid it on Monina's shoulder.

Then, clutching the little arm, it squeezed it tighter — tighter — like an iron vice, while in a voice which Monina did not recognise as human, but rather as the strange croak which dwells in a doll's body and utters "papa" and "mamma," it asked her:

"Who are you? What is your name?"

The instinct of self-preservation conquered her terrors, and at last poor Ramona found her voice. She gave a shrill cry and pulled away her arm. Leon Roch came to the door of the adjoining room where he too stood still, like a statue in a niche. Unlike St. Thomas, he saw but he could not believe. For a minute or two he could not shake off his dismay and astonishment, seeing clearly the dilemma in which he was placed. Her appearance there was extraordinary no doubt, but anything rather than absurd; what was absurd, was her coming fashionably bedizened with such extravagant elegance at this hour of the morning. It was a phenomenon which had formed no factor in his calculations and which was, so far, perfectly inexplicable. Having presently mastered his feelings and determined to face the scene that was evidently inevitable, Leon, before saying a word to his wife, took Monina's hand, went to the top of the stairs and called some one to whom he entrusted the child; then, turning back into the room, he shut the door resolutely, like a lion-tamer who locks himself in with the savage favourites, who, to him, are, after all, only part of his family.

María had seated herself; in fact she could hardly stand.

"You did not expect me?" she said tremulously.

"No, I certainly did not."

"You thought you were free! poor man . . . free to pursue . . . without a road . . . free, I mean, to pursue the road of infamy without let or hindrance. No, no! you must account to . . . to me. . ."

All the speeches that María had in fancy delivered with so much unction had evaporated, word by word. She made a desperate effort to remember a single effective phrase; in vain! they were gone. She could hardly catch at a word as they whirled through her brain, and she could only cry out in a husky voice:

"Guilty wretch!"

Leon smiled slightly and María went on: "Wretch! I am here to apprehend you."

"Very well," said Leon calmly accepting the idea. "But allowing that I am guilty, and a wretch, and that you are the police — you have no chain to fetter me with because you yourself have broken it."

María had prepared her rejoinders on the supposition that her husband would answer her as she had imagined; but as Leon said something quite different she was in the position of an actor who has lost his cues.

"The chain," she murmured, not at the instant understanding what he meant, "and I, you say, have broken it."

"Yes, you. Who but you gave me my liberty?"

"You are a wretch, a libertine, a villain!" cried María, dropping into the vulgar recrimination of every

angry wife. "Liberty? What do you mean by it? You have none. You are my husband — tied to me by a bond that none but God can sever, since it was He who bound us. You abominable materialists think that the ordinance of matrimony is a thing to be played fast and loose with. I tell you it is a divine institution."

"And a human institution as well. But we need not bandy words María. Tell me what did you come here for?"

"And now he dares to ask me what I came for!" she exclaimed, her nervousness giving way to a frenzy of wrath. "I will tell you. I came to require of you an account of your criminal behaviour, to surprise you in your lair, to put you to open shame, and then — and then to scorn you."

"But you could have scorned me without coming here."

"I wished to see whether you had a remnant of shame and decency; whether I could surprise you, face to face; if you would dare to confess your sin. . ."

"You have, you see, surprised me somewhat," said Leon raising his eyes. "As regards my sins, if I have committed any, it is not to you that I owe a confession."

"What audacious impudence! . . . But I came for something more," added María livid with rage. "I came in the hope of finding here that abandoned woman, and of giving her the name she deserves; to. . ." She clenched her fists and her eyes glared.

"What woman?"

"The hypocrite can ask! I do not name her for it would stain my lips . . . do you dare to tell me that you are not on terms of disgraceful — of criminal intimacy with her?"

"With whom?"

"With her. . ." And she pointed in the direction of Suertebella.

"María," said Leon gravely and turning pale, "I do not like to see you a propagator of base slander. I should find it very difficult to cease to respect you; but if you wish that I should never fail in the consideration which I owe to you, never repeat that question. Be silent . . . go . . . leave me. You do not want my love since your religion is all in all to you; go, serve your altars, and leave me alone with my conscience."

María drew herself up, clenching her arms against her breast like a wild beast preparing to spring; her eyes for a moment seemed dimmed, but the next instant they flashed fire.

"Coward, villain!" she exclaimed. "Do you dare to tear yourself away from me, your lawful wife, the wife to whom you belong and whom you shall never escape! . . . No, never — since God has pronounced us one? Who are you, a miserable wretch, to desecrate a sacrament and disobey the Father of us all?"

"Desecrate a sacrament? I . . . I?" Leon stood up and went close to his wife. "It is not I," he said, "who desecrate the sacrament."

"Who then?"

"You," he said, pointing with his finger so close to

her face that it was as if he meant to put out her eyes.

"I?"

"You. — You cast it to the winds. When I was trying to save our home and peace you said to me: 'My God requires me to say that I do not love you.'"

For a second María was abashed and silent; her wrath had abated a little.

"It is true that I said that. And, after all, if you desire my love, why do you not try to merit it by becoming a Christian and a Catholic. In spite of your wicked atheism I cannot say that I do not love you... a little. But oh! why are you not like me? Why do you not imitate my piety?"

"Because it is beyond me," he retorted sarcastically, "because there are forms of piety so unnatural, so insane, so absurd, silly and irrational... But at least you must admit that it was you, you yourself who desecrated the sacrament."

"But I," replied his wife, catching at a cogent argument. "I have been faithful and you have not."

Leon was staggered for an instant.

"I have been faithful too," he said. "I swear it before God and by the sacred memory of my father and mother! Faithful, tender and kind to the last extremity — even when you, carried away by a sickly piety, and by the example and ardent warnings of your hapless brother, built up a wall of ice between your soul and mine. You refused to bestow on me even the commonplaces of affection, the gentle words and tones

which may take the place of love when love is dead; you humiliated me with your senseless scruples and cruel recriminations, that bore a hideous resemblance to vulgar abuse; you made my home empty and dark, casting a gloom over it that oppressed my heart, dried my brain, and embittered my blood; you took a delight in neglecting your person to the extent even of sluttishness; to annoy me more deeply you dressed in absurd and shapeless clothes, and took a pride in making yourself repulsive and odious. Every word I spoke you regarded as blasphemy, and all my thoughts and feelings were crimes worthy to be punished by the inquisition. You were mad and blind! If you felt called to such a career of sanctity why did you not try to imitate the patience — a saintly patience, surely — with which I endured your proud assumption of humility, your unchristian bitterness, and your devotion, which for insolence, vexatiousness and recalcitrancy was for all the world like the pranks of a troup of demons playing the part of angels with masks on.

"And you come to me — to me who have borne all this — to me whom you have hated and tormented — to me! and call me to account instead of asking my forgiveness. 'Pardon,' María, is the only word that it becomes you to utter this day! after all your bigotry, and hypocrisy, and insults, you desire me to account to you . . . for what? A woman who has told her husband that she does not love him cannot call him to account. I have been more than considerate in not declaring our marriage as void, in still acknowledging you as my wife,

in regarding myself as still bound to you by some invisible tie, in asking not for liberty but only for peace—not for compensation but only for respite!"

"You might indeed lodge some complaint against me," retorted María, "if, since that time, you had been as faithful to me as I have been to you. But you have not; nay you have long, long been false to me."

"It is not true."

"Yes, false and faithless," she insisted, clinging to the statement with feverish vehemence. "And instead of defending yourself you turn upon me! Those are the tactics of every clever criminal . . . I was blind, ignorant of your perfidy. You have cheated me shamefully!"

"It is not true."

"For a long time, for years."

"Not true."

"But at last it has all come to my knowledge. I have discovered the whole truth. You cannot deny it, for the present throws light on the past and your crime of to-day betrays that of yesterday. You have lost all decency; you do not even hide the distant date of your intimacy—and here, in this house, where you have buried yourself to revel in your sin, you pass whole days playing with that child . . . with that sniffling little brat! . . ."

Leon glared at his wife with a terrible expression; his eyes darted arrows of wrath. María drew a deep breath and added in a hoarse voice: "With her child—which is yours."

With livid lips and a murderous glare in his eyes, looking as an assassin may in the very act, Leon went up to his wife and seizing her by the arm he shook her in his fury:

"It is a calumny," he said, "a lie. . ."

Then he let her go, swallowing down the rest of the words that were on his tongue.

María, stung and devoured by all the serpents of jealousy, had no words for the rage that burned within her; for when jealousy has reached a certain pitch it cannot find utterance — it must act. Her revenge could not be satisfied with anything less than the destruction of the innocent cause of her indignation. To tear Monina limb from limb was what her passion prompted her to do, and without a moment's hesitation she acted on the impulse; she snatched up the doll that Monina had left on a chair and tore it to pieces — arms, legs, hair — the trembling hands of the outraged wife wreaked her vengeance on the senseless toy. Then, flinging the fragments away, she exclaimed in broken gasps:

"There . . . that . . . that is how your lawful wife ought to treat her . . . her. . ." She was almost choking.

Leon, recovering his self-command, spoke again.

"I should have thought you incapable of becoming the mouthpiece of such an infamous slander. Of what use is piety if it leaves you in ignorance of the first elements of charity? You never can have had any feelings!"

"Oh yes, I had once," said María, exhausted by her own rage. "But I can thank God that I have not transmitted them to any child of yours. He has blessed me in making me childless, as He has blessed other women in giving them children. He could not grant a family to an atheist!"

"Your blasphemy appals me," said Leon, who could endure no more. "Can a sacrament be more utterly annulled, or a bond more effectually cut? Between you and me, María, there is a great gulf — bottomless and infinite; a space of endless desert in which, try as I may, I cannot see a single idea or feeling that we can have in common. Let us part forever; do not try to bring together two distinct worlds which cannot approach each other without tempest and lightnings. If there ever were two irreconcilable beings, we are they. For I too am a fanatic; you have taught me to be, like you, a bigot — an ardent, even a relentless bigot. We will part, each to his own shore, and let the waste that lies between us be as the ocean of oblivion. Nay, to soothe our consciences, I will say the ocean of forgiveness. Each may forgive; both may forget . . . good-bye."

While he was speaking María's feelings of anger and revenge had given way to other and very different sentiments, calmer and more contemplative, which by degrees took absolute possession of her agitated mind. She looked at her husband and found him — why should she deny it? — worthier than ever to be the friend and companion of a loving wife. His face had a charm of its own, with the dark beard that gave it an indefinable

expression of romantic melancholy, with the eager eyes and broad brow, on which a reflected gleam of sunshine at that moment fell, like a beam of glory on that wise and intelligent head. This mute contemplation of his manly good looks appealed directly to her heart and made it beat with excitement. Her first and only love revived; she remembered the happiness of the early days of their marriage and against the background of these memories the fact stood out that the man was interesting, attractive, and — why not confess it? — very good-looking; she could not take her eyes off his face. 'But not for her — for another woman!' This was the spark that fired the whole edifice, that scathed and rent her soul, so that all her piety leaked out, so to speak. This was the diabolical idea that turned her ice to fire, her scorn to a tenderer passion and all that was harsh in her nature to gentleness — that lent grace and elegance even to her absurd dress. She was desperately in love, in short, from jealousy rather than from sympathy. It was a fearful blow to her to hear herself calmly dismissed — with a friendly pardon, it is true — but still definitely dismissed. She could have borne to accept her dismissal and part from him for ever; she might even forget him, and forgive him for having ceased to love her . . . but that he should love another. . .

"No, never, never!" she exclaimed, as the result of her reflections; and her eyes sparkled through tears. But she would not confess the weakness, and hastily drying her eyes she went on:

"One night you asked me. . ."

"Yes, I asked you. . ."

"And I told you that God forbid my love for you . . . and it is true; God did forbid it. I felt it in my soul, but yet . . . you see, you should not have taken the answer. You should have asked once more."

"But I had asked you so often, and in so many different ways."

"Well, now I ask you," and she went up to him and laid her hands on his shoulders; "I ask you: 'Do you still love me?'" Leon's nature rebelled against a lie. He paused to question his conscience. For an instant he thought that a generous falsehood would be the nobler course; but then he revolted against the notion of a mock devotion. Almost before he had thought out the matter the truth broke from his lips.

"No....My God . . . mine, María, compels me to say No."

She dropped back into her seat. It was with a sort of roar that she exclaimed:

"Your God is a fiend!"

"You have no claim to anything more than my respect."

"You love some one else?" she went on, gnawing the corner of her handkerchief, "tell me the truth . . . I know you are truthful . . . confess it and I will leave you in peace for ever."

"But I deny your right to ask," said Leon after a mement's hesitation.

"Deny my right if you will; but reply."

Leon was on the point of saying: "Well then I

do." But there are cases in which the truth is a form of murder; when it is baser than a lie.

"Well then," he said, "no."

"Your face betrays you, it is false!" said María starting up.

"My face?"

"You never used to tell lies . . . I know that you never told lies. But this minute you prove to me that you have lost even that grace!"

Leon made no reply, and María, after a short pause, went on:

"I have no further business here. . ." Still he said nothing; he did not even look at her. "None, none," she said. "I blush to think that I should ever have crossed the threshold of this abode of scandal and wickedness."

She moistened her parched lips with her tongue, but there was a bitter dryness on both, compared to which aloes are as honey for sweetness. Her impulse was to spit out something . . . to spit out that other She whose name was as the savour of fruits plucked in the court of hell. She stammered some inarticulate words and bit her lips till the blood came.

"It is a shame . . . a disgrace!" she muttered. "To have fallen to such depths . . . to have flung myself at the feet of this wretch . . . a woman like me . . . a woman! . . ." She was too angry to shed tears—even tears of rage. "Scorned . . . despised. . ."

"Despised, no," said her husband, moving towards her with an impulse of generosity.

"Despised as if I were a. . ."

"Never despised. . ."

"Not even. . ."

"Well?"

"Not worthy of your consideration."

"Consideration, certainly. . ." said Leon, who was as much disturbed as she was; but she was going through a phase of reaction into the depths of dejection.

"To you," she went on, "I am not even good to look at. You hate the sight of me; I have lost. . ."

"No," said Leon, "I swear to you that, since I first met you, I have never seen you so beautiful as you are to-day."

"And yet," she cried writhing in her chair, "and yet you do not love me. . ."

"You," retorted Leon, "you who have so much cultivated the spiritual life must surely know that beauty of face and person is not what can best captivate the soul!"

"And to you my nature is hideous?" And she struck her forehead with a wild groan, as though she had suddenly remembered some vital fact or had come to her right mind after an interval of mental delusion. "How should it be otherwise when I am a Christian and you a reprobate atheist? Of course, of course. . . and I have been so mad — mad do I say? — So wicked, as to take my eyes for a moment away from my Lord and Saviour to gaze on you — an infidel. I have put off my black serge to dress myself in this frippery, fit

only for a lost woman, with the base purpose of pleasing — of courting you. My God! canst Thou ever forgive me?"

She snatched off her hat in delirious rage, and tearing it to fragments strewed them about the floor. In her haste she pulled down her hair which she had not fastened securely; the black locks fell about her temples and over her shoulders. She looked like a mad creature as she went close up to her husband and said to him in a low voice:

"I am as bad as you. I am an unworthy wretch. I forgot my God, my duty, and my dignity for your sake. . . . Wretch! I do not deserve to be called a saint, for a saint. . . ." She glanced at her handsome dress with horror. "Women who devote themselves truly to God would not have put on this livery of sin. I am ashamed to see myself so tricked out. Away with you, for filthy rags!"

She tore the trimmings with unnatural strength, rending the stuff and ripping off the buttons, and at length she threw off her cloak and gloves and flung them into a corner.

"Enough, enough; I have stooped too low. I will return to God — to my seclusion and indifference to this world. I will curse my beauty for having pleased you. I will return to the peaceful practice of religion. No worldly humiliations can touch me then; I will find rest in sacred meditations, conversing with God and seeing the angels, and hearing the music of their songs in Heaven; I will go back to my peaceful

life where, at any rate, I may be so happy as to forget you! In its gloom you will not come to curse my sight. . . . I have sinned and am unworthy of the least of the Lord's mercies. Forgive, O Lord! Forgive! Never again will I sin thus."

She fell on her knees and melted into tears that flowed in a ready torrent, while she covered her face with her trembling hands. They trickled through her fingers, and down on to her bosom, where she had torn her dress open. Leon was alarmed; the pathetic, helpless attitude and bitter fit of weeping touched him deeply. He bent over her and raising her in his arms placed her in a seat.

"María! for God's sake do not go mad," he said. "Compose yourself — control yourself." But she kept her hands clasped over her face.

Leon laid his hand on her shoulder, tried to rearrange her disordered hair and pull her dress round her — for she had really half-undressed herself in her fury. Suddenly she threw her arm round his neck with a convulsive energy and he felt her burning lips close to his cheek, but she did not kiss him; in a husky faint voice she said:

"I will strangle you — I will murder you if you love any one else. — Am I not handsomer, am I not more beautiful than she is? . . . . Mine! you are mine. . . . Mine only. . . ." But her grasp relaxed and her arms fell helplessly by her side; her head drooped on her breast, her hair veiling her face; a spasmodic quiver passed over her throat and neck — a shiver of the skin;

he heard a faint murmur from her lips: "Dying — sinful. . . ." And she sat in a heap speechless and unconscious. He felt her heart — her pulse; there was no perceptible flutter.

He rushed to the stairs, shouting for help. No sooner had he opened the door than the room was full of people. Curiosity had brought the neighbours together, for they had heard loud voices; the cries they knew were uttered by the wife of Señor Leon Roch, and a wife who cries out is a legitimate object of sympathy and curiosity. They rushed up into the room, and with them the Marquis de Fúcar, who had come to give Leon his little commission for Paris. But they all stood in helpless astonishment.

"Take her to my house at once," said Fúcar. "Have you any brandy, any spirit? The first thing is to put her to bed, to send for a doctor. . . . Take her to my house."

"No, the doctor can come here," said Leon.

"But you have no bed," said Fúcar looking round at the dismantled room.

"There is my bed," said Facunda. "A king has not got a better."

"Move away all of you — let me see. I think her heart is still beating."

"Yes, yes, it is certainly beating," exclaimed Leon hopefully.

"It will be nothing — merely a fainting fit — and all for a squabble! You see the consequences of exag-

geration. . . . But we must get her to bed. Wrap her in a cloak — get me a cloak."

The Marquis de Fúcar was an invaluable person in these emergencies, when prompt decision, energy, and a tone of command are indispensable. Four strong arms lifted María, wrapped her carefully in a cloak, and carried her down stairs. It was like carrying a body to be buried. Leon looked on and allowed them to act, as he would have looked on at any other step Fúcar might have taken. It was like a scene in a dream, and for some time he failed to remember that this arrangement, which from one point of view was the best thing that could be done, from another was the very reverse; but by that time the little procession had started.

Pepa's astonishment on seeing this inanimate figure brought into her house can easily be imagined. . . . "Merciful Heaven! Maria Sudre!" and what a state she was in. She could understand the fainting fit, but it was not so easy to account for the torn dress and dishevelled hair.

They carried her into the first bed-room they came to and laid her on the bed.

"You have forgotten the most important thing of all," said Pepa. "To undo her stays."

"To be sure. How stupid of us!"

And, as he spoke, Don Pedro cut the laces with his pocket-knife. The village doctor now came in; he spoke of congestion of the brain, and regarded the case as serious. A messenger was at once despatched to bring the most celebrated consulting physician of

Madrid. Presently, however, an improvement was evident; María turned over, opened her eyes, and breathed more easily. If it were but a fainting fit after all.

But María as she recovered her faculties was evidently delirious; she took no heed of where she was or of those who stood by her side, not recognising her husband. After talking feebly but wildly for a few minutes she fell asleep; silence, perfect silence, was indispensable. The doctor gave some instructions and prescriptions.

"Now," he said, "leave her in silence and darkness. There is at any rate no immediate danger; but you must not allow the slightest sound in this room or in those adjoining; and she is better alone than with more than one person in the room." He went away.

Pepa with her finger to her lips enjoined silence. Leon and the Marquis Fúcar stood speechless, gazing at the patient. At the end of half an hour Pepa said:

"She is sound asleep and seems to be comfortable. When she wakes I will come and sit with her; I will see that she has everything she needs."

"No, no," Leon interposed eagerly. "I beg — I entreat you not to come into the room at all." Pepa bowed her head and she and her father went away on tiptoe.

Leon sat down by the bed. He was still under the influence of the horror and alarm of the first shock, and even now had no clear idea of the position in which he and his wife stood to each other. María lay still, sleep-

ing as if she were quite tired out; the hapless husband looked vaguely round the room. He sighed. There was something eerie in the air. Presently Pepa returned through a door concealed by some hangings; Leon looked up, startled and vexed; but she came nearer evidently puzzled and inquisitive. She was paler even than María — as pale as death. Her footfall was inaudible on the thick carpet and she might have been a ghost. She took no notice of Leon's anxious gesture of warning but came close to the bed, and looked down fixedly at the sleeping woman as if she were studying the most interesting, but at the same time the most appalling, object in the universe. At her heels crept Monina, as softly as a kitten that steals in and out, and clutching at her mother's skirts in visible alarm, she pointed to the bed and whispered: "Big dolly dead."

CHAPTER VI.

RETURN TO CONSCIOUSNESS.

LEON ROCH sat alone, but not at peace, by the bed where his wife lay sleeping. Watching her face, to note in its varying expression anything that might be a symptom of danger or a sign of improvement, his attention wandered occasionally from the patient to himself and the painful position in which he was placed by events and persons. How was it that he had fallen into it. How was it that he had not been able to foresee and prevent this diabolical crossing of the two circles in which he moved — the two orbits of antagonistic ideas and feelings? And as he asked himself the answer came with a mocking laugh from the depths of his consciousness, in the words of his own theories at the time of his engagement and marriage. In the early days of this veracious history he had, as we know, dreamed magnificent dreams, and among others that of moulding his life by making himself its master and ruling it absolutely to his will. But the men who cherish this dream of triumph take no account of what we may call Social Destiny — an irresistible power composed of creeds — our own and others; of personal or collective resistance; of the errors — nay of the virtues — of our neighbours; of a thousand trifles

which, from time to time, must be defied or deferred tc and finally of law and custom which it is rarely permi sible, or even possible, to fight single-handed.

Leon was sorry for himself; at the same time h could not help laughing himself to scorn. "It is reall absurd," he said to himself, "that a stone cannot mov without rolling down hill."

As he thought of all this and much more, he di not cease to watch the progress of his patient. Two c three times in the course of the day María roused fro her torpid state, but her mind was clouded; she kne no one and talked wildly. Conscious of suffering an unable to determine or localize it she tried to fling he self out of bed, and Leon had to use some force to pr vent her. Towards night she became quieter but th fever did not diminish. The doctor, however, foun that her pulse was steadier. In her sleep she spok more clearly and coherently, but at last, clasping h hands on her bosom she cried aloud: "No, no, neve He is mine — mine!" With this she woke to clear co sciousness; her eyes wandered round the room examir ing the walls, the ceiling, the bed — she perceived th she was in a strange place. Her calm gaze showe that her mind was collected though somewhat wea and that she had recovered her powers of judgmen Seeing her husband sitting by the bed, alone, watchfu and anxious, her eyes softened and she smiled as sh said: "You?"

Leon went close to her and bent down putting h hand under the coverlet to feel her pulse; she clutche

at his wrist and clasped it to her breast saying with a tremulous sob:

"What a mercy, to know that it was only a dream. I saw you — it was dark, and they were going to put you into a fiery furnace. I was terrified to death — I screamed out. . ."

Her imagination, excited by emotion and rage had been entangled in a vortex of horrible visions — a frenzying whirl of shapes and colours ending without colour or shape, and then had gone through an agony of terror — lost in a void of space and blackness, filled only by the very presence of Fear. As she reached the bottom of the abyss, rushing downwards with increasing impetus, she was suddenly dazzled with light. This was Hell. She saw it of course with its hideous inhabitants as she had imagined them in her waking hours from written descriptions and pictures; but as our conceptions of the supernatural are always modified by the ideas of the time, and wear the aspect of familiar scenes and objects — so that, as we know, our notion even of the Almighty varies with the age — María saw the infernal precincts as vast railway tunnels or gasometers reeking with smoke and stench, or as a murky foundry with its roaring forges and machines clashing and shrieking, with the groaning of bellows, the thud of hammers, and the glare and swelter of a furnace. The demons, while retaining their traditional guise of deformed men with hoofs and tails, seemed to toil like smiths and scavengers, like the myrmidons of a gas-factory or of a coal-mine, the Cyclops of Birmingham or Sheffield. All

were grimy, and bathed in sweat, and shiny as with the exuded grease of machinery. It was a gulf formed by the meeting of tunnels, and galleries, and iron causeways; the atmosphere was a mixture of coal dust, sulphur, gas and petroleum — the odour was most abhorrent to our heroine. In the midst of it all there was a tumult, a noise, a turmoil of which she could have given no conception but by saying that a thousand trains rushed at express speed on a central point and met — but no sooner was the catastrophe accomplished than it at once began again. Locomotives were in fact the principal feature in the Inferno of her delirious dream; she saw them tearing past, flying with wings tipped with claws of iron, snorting, groaning, rolling fiery eyes, and breathing out smoke and sparks and steam. Though they were as large — as she thought — as in real life, in that infinite void they were as a cloud of flies buzzing stupendously.

Soon after their marriage Leon and María had made a tour in Germany where, among other things, they had seen Krupp's great foundry works at Essen. The scene had made a deep impression on María that had never quite been effaced, and in this torment of hallucination the images brought away from that immense laboratory played a leading part in the composition of the picture of the eternal limbo whither men are consigned for their sins. Smaller foundries of the same kind, at Barcelona and in France, had supplied various details and gave movement to the terrific scene. The damned were spun round in a lathe and rounded off like cannons or passed

between rollers, coming out as flat as paper; then they were cast into the white heat of the furnace and recovered their natural form. Some were put into chains and their heads laid on an anvil under a gigantic hammer that crushed their skulls. The inferior demons — the rabble rout of Hell, amused themselves by drilling holes in the skulls of some of their victims, and inserting a spoonful of fused metal — the extract of a heap of books which were seething in a bulky black cauldron, a hell-broth of heretical ideas. Others, whose crime was evil-speaking of sacred things, had their tongues torn out by particularly hideous fiends, and these tongues, hundreds and thousands of them, were twisted together to form a rope which was then hung to the vault, looking like strings of sausages put there to dry. Others again were put through a strange torment, almost impossible to describe. The wretches were knotted together, legs with arms, and arms with heads, into a string or chain — a tissue of suffering and wailing. This chain was then dragged out by a huge screw, till its length was stretched from miles to leagues, while the bones cracked with a noise like that of nuts trampled on by a thousand horses, and the flesh was racked and torn; and these again, being flung into the furnace, recovered their original shape to go once more through the same torture.

María saw all this in an anguish of terror: She was there, and she was not; she could not shriek, she could not even breathe. But at length there came a moment when terror gave way to grief. Among the crowd of

damned — guilty of unpardonable sin — was one who seemed to be especially heinous, judging from the crowd of demons, male and female, who surrounded him. This was Leon. María saw him seized, clutched by the horrible greasy hands, cast into the boiling cauldron, dragged out with a skimmer, pushed back with a spoon. Finally they picked him up on a pitchfork and carried him to the mouth of a furnace so fiery that any earthly fire would seem as ice by comparison. Then it was that María uttered a cry, threw up her arm and hand — her arm that seemed of enormous length, her hand that smarted with the burning heat:

"No, no, never — he is mine!"

The dream was broken, it vanished like the page of a book that is suddenly closed — but the impression remained.

CHAPTER VII.

WILL SHE DIE.

MARIA awoke to find herself in a large, bare room. Her husband stood in front of her, alive and tangible. She did not recognize the place, but she felt that she was in safe hands.

"Whose house is this?" she asked.

"Mine . . . Be calm. I am here.—Do you not see me?"

María's eyes wandered round the walls, and up to the ceiling.

"What a dismal place!" she murmured. "And I—did I come here?"

Then she was silent, trying to collect her confused memories.

The morning after the event which might well be called a catastrophe, Leon had discussed with the Marquis de Fúcar and Moreno Rubio the best means of moving María back to Madrid. Don Pedro thought the scheme dangerous, and the physician had firmly opposed it, saying that, in the state in which she was, the journey, no matter how carefully managed, might result in a rapid and fatal collapse. Leon was excessively annoyed and disappointed; nay, would certainly have carried out his purpose, if the doctor had not threatened to withdraw, and give up all further responsibility. As

it was impossible to remove her from Suertebella, though it was the last spot on earth where she ought, or could wish to be, he thought that the best plan would be to dismantle the room; and by the permission of his generous host he removed all the pictures, ornaments, porcelain and bric-a-brac. The room itself was very unpretending and was only hung with a common paper, so that it now looked bare enough.

"Yes, you came here," replied her husband, stroking her hair. "You have been ill; but you are better now; it will be nothing serious."

"Ah yes!" said María, struck with a sudden pang of remembrance. "It was my jealousy, your infidelity that brought me here. — But is this the house?"

"This is my bedroom."

"Those walls — that high ceiling. — Why did you not take me home at once?"

"We will go when you have rested a little."

"What has been the matter?"

"A little over-fatigue; it will lead to nothing serious."

"I remember — you behaved disgracefully to me. What did I say to you? Did I say I forgave you? Or did I only dream it?"

"Yes — you forgave me," said Leon to soothe her.

"You promised you would love no one but me. You swore that you loved me, and to make me believe it you gave me proofs . . . Is it so or did I dream it?"

"It is quite true."

"Ah! and you told me you had made up your

mind to renounce your errors, and to believe all that I believe. That was not a dream?"

"No, a reality. — You must compose yourself."

"And then we made it up — was that it?"

"Just so."

"And loved each other as we used when we were first married."

"Yes — just so."

"And you said I had been deceived as to your connection with. . ."

María turned her head and fixed her eyes on her husband's face.

"We will not discuss the past," he said kindly. "We must make an effort to restore you to health, and you must help us, María."

"Help you, what to do?'

"To save you, María."

"Aye indeed! I must try to save myself! My God! I have sinned. . ." She was overcome with grief.

"I am speaking of your life — of your bodily health which is in danger."

"Oh! I do not care for the health of my body, but for that of my soul which is in peril . . . A little while ago, I do not exactly know how long, I thought I was dead. Now I am alive; but I think I shall die soon . . . and I am in mortal sin."

"You dreamt it, my child, it was a dream. Be calm, do not frighten yourself."

"In mortal sin," repeated María putting her hands

to her head. "Tell me did I dream then that you told me. . . ?"

"I ?"

"That you did not love me ?"

"What could it be, but a dream ?"

María threw her arms round her husband's neck and gently drew his face down to her own.

"Say it again that I may get rid of the miserable impression of that horrible dream." They exchanged a few words in a low voice.

"Then give me a proof of your affection," said Maria. "As we are a long way from Madrid, and as I cannot go out for some days, send a message for me to Padre Paoletti. I want to talk to him."

"I will fetch him myself."

"You yourself?"

"Why not? I don't mind taking any trouble to gratify you."

In the course of the day the doctor came. Leon had thought it prudent to confide to him some of his secrets, for, as María's attack had been brought on by mental excitement, it was necessary that the physician should be aware of the delicate details. Moreno Rubio and Leon Roch were close friends; their intimacy was founded on sympathies of character, and on common grounds of scientific views and interests. That morning, when Leon had disclosed to his friend such facts as were indispensable to a sure diagnosis, they had a conversation of which some important fragments may be recorded.

"So that in short you do not care for your wife—neither more nor less," said Rubio, who liked to state facts as plainly as possible.

"I have always had a horror of falsehood," replied Leon. "And I am bound to confess that María does not inspire me with any affectionate emotion. I have two feelings when I think of her: one is the deepest pity; the other is a certain amount of respect."

"Precisely; but those feelings are not enough to make a good husband; however, there are others in your soul which might make you—and assuredly do make you a kind-hearted man. Tell me, do you wish your wife to live?"

Leon started like a man who has been struck.

"Such a question is an insult. The very disquietude of my conscience impels me to desire that María should not die."

"Very good. Then if you wish that María should live," said Moreno, laying his hand on his friends' shoulder, "the first indispensable thing is to soothe the irritation produced by her jealousy—which, unfortunately, is but too well-founded; her mind has received a terrible shock, and it must be allowed to recover its balance. Every life has, as it were a rhythm, a beat, of its own, to which it goes on regularly and smoothly. A sudden and complete disturbance of the measure may result in the gravest consequences, even in death. We have here an instance in point. We must therefore lay ourselves out to restore as quickly, and as effectually as possible, the steady measure that has been disturbed;

then we can deal with the frightful blow to the nervous system which has affected, and may be fatal to the brain. All these jealousies must be eliminated as quickly as possible, so that her feelings not being excited, the whole machine may have a chance of recovering its tone and balance. All the scenes which gave rise to her attack must by degrees be effaced from her memory. If she lives there will be time enough to let her know the truth. She must be saved from any fresh outbreaks of anger or despair by being persuaded that nothing has occurred; and above all, my dear friend, you must treat her like a sick child; give her everything she asks for and indulge all her whims, particularly as concerns anything that may divert and occupy her mind. Your wife — I am well aware — will claim your love and devotion: it is impossible to restrict her in her demands."

It was after this that Leon raised the question of removing his wife from Suertebella; but Rubio positively negatived the proposal.

Having abandoned this idea as homicide — that was the word employed by Moreno — they agreed to dismantle the room, to send to Madrid for the servants who were in the habit of waiting on María, and for various trifles which would answer the purpose of carrying out the illusion. Before they parted Leon said to his friend.

"Answer me frankly. Will my wife die?"

"It is impossible to say. It may yet end fatally. You must leave me to ascertain precisely the kind of trouble with which we have to contend."

That evening, when María was herself again, after going through her visions of a hell full of hideous machines and toiling demons, Moreno came in as was previously mentioned.

"Ha, ha!" he exclaimed, smiling as he found the husband and wife in such close proximity. "Like two turtle-doves! And how is my patient? — A good pulse; but we must have rest, absolute rest of body and mind."

María looked at her husband and frowned.

"No, no. You are not to look so cross at this good man who is as devoted to you as a newly-married lover. You will see — in a few days you will be able to go out together to smell the lilacs, and watch the butterflies. A sensible woman ought never to listen to spiteful gossip. When people are envious what can they do but talk nonsense? Now, my dear lady, you are going to be perfectly rational and calm; we are going to sign a permanent peace and be very fond and loving ... I say it for you both ... Well, let me see your tongue."

Then he himself mixed a draught, Leon and Rafaela helping him.

While this was going forward in the sick room the Marquis de Fúcar, setting aside for a moment the great business of the loan, already almost concluded, went to join his daughter, and said with a grave face:

"Rubio's anticipations are very serious. I am afraid we shall have a terrible calamity under our roof. However, we must not despair; science can do much,

and God can do more. All we can do is to help sicence to the best of our little power, and to implore the intervention of Providence."

Pepa, raising her anxious eyes to look at her father lifted a face so pale that it was death-like; and with the desperation of a person who tears open a wound that it may bleed more freely, she asked:

"Is she dying?"

"That was what I was telling you, and you did not listen," said Don Pedro, who was also suffering from a wound. "It is only our duty to show our unfortunate guest how deeply we sympathise in his misfortune. We must do something worthy of our house and name. Do not you think it will be well to perform a religious ceremony that may give due expression to our desire to see María out of danger? We will do it on a scale of magnificence. The chapel here stood me in eighty thousand dollars—though it might have cost less if the artists I employed had been men of less talent and pretensions. — Well then, to-morrow I will have a solemn penitential service, which all the servants and people shall attend, with you at their head. I give you full authority to spend as much as you think proper in tapers. The worthy priest from Polvoranca shall celebrate mass, and if you would like to have some more priests, send to all that are within reach."

Having thus spoken, he sighed deeply and left her. Was it that, having a heavy burthen on his own soul, he yearned to petition the favour and mercy of Heaven on his own behalf? But we do not know what were

the troubles which had so suddenly transformed the marquis' radiant smiles into a sour grimace of annoyance. The loan, after crossing the troubled waters of the Spanish bourse with a fair wind, would this very day reach the haven of realization; and it was quite certain that Fúcar, Soligny and a few other birds of the same feather in Paris, Amsterdam, and London, would haul in a handful of gold for interest, brokerage and commission. What then. . . . ?

The chapel of Suertebella was a handsome edifice, at one angle of the mansion; high-roofed, thick-walled, and shining as if it had been varnished. The interior was of stucco, full of imitations of coloured marbles and porphyry, with a great deal of gilding on bosses and mouldings, which produced the effect of a lavish display of livery-buttons and gold cord on the pediments and spandrils. The style of architecture can only be described as Græco-Chino-Roman — Gothic gargoyles combined with ornament of the new classical style which originated at Munich, and which our architects have adopted for the porticoes of our houses, the pantheons of our cemetries, the entrances of our town-halls, and the dining-rooms of our millionaires. The pseudojasper, gold, and brilliant colours dazzled the eye till they all seemed to be swimming round and round the dome like fishes in a glass bowl. The roof was supported by highly respectable angels who, in the sculptor's studio, had played the part of seductive nymphs; and the paintings in the dome represented the cardinal Virtues, who had been predestined to figure

as Muses. Everything blazed with the glaring splendour which is now fashionable in our private rooms, and which in them is not out of place. There was not a Christian attribute or allegory that had not been evolved from the palette or the sculptor's mould by the artists employed to decorate this chapel. We shall presently become acquainted with a ribald jester who, it was said, was one day giving a farcical, not to say a sacrilegious explanation of the figures that adorned it: This female figure with bandaged eyes and a chalice in her hand, represented Spain whom the financiers of state had blindfolded that she might not see the bitterness of her cup of ruin; that one, leaning on an anchor, with her eyes disconsolately turned up to Heaven, was Commerce in despair; and the matron caressing a whole tribe of children was Beneficence, a pleasing emblem of the interest taken by the Fúcars in property and labour, and of the tender solicitude with which they lent them a helping hand to the work-house. The four Fathers of the Church, all represented as writing very gravely with "The Eagle's Quill," personified the Press, always ready to sing the praises of wealthy capitalists, who, before acting on their own account, take advantage of its ready pen. The vessel sinking in the waves of Tiberias was the State, whose orators and leaders suffer so much buffeting, while the Multiplication of the Loaves was obviously prefigurative of the distribution and reception of certain articles supplied under contract; finally, the stolid Sibyls, sitting with their hands before them in utter absence of mind, repre-

sented government administration. And the irreverent commentator went on to give new readings of the texts that were inscribed on the fillets and architraves for the edification of the faithful: "I am Pedro (Peter) and on this stone I will build my house. Give unto me that which is Cæsar's, and that which is God's."

The chapel, the allowance being made for modern taste in ecclesiastical architecture, was a handsome one. It was on a level with the ground-floor, and there was a second door to the garden by which the congregation were admitted. The roof rose higher than that of the house, displaying its bell-tower somewhat ostentatiously. It was dedicated to San Luis Gonzaga — whose image — a really fine piece of sculpture — stood on the high altar beneath a large representation of Calvary.

The pious ceremony took place, as Don Pedro had arranged. The sun had scarcely risen when wax tapers innumerable were lighted on the high altar and in the side chapels, and thousands of delicious flowers, arranged in jars and vases, added their tribute of beauty and perfume. The little sanctuary was, to use a vulgar phrase, a blaze of splendour. The lights and odours inspired a sort of fervour by stimulating the senses and firing the imagination, so that sight and hearing were powerfully excited. All the servants on the estate were present, from the steward to the lowest scullion, and from the head-gardener to the tiniest stable-boy. The service was celebrated by the priest from Polvoranca, a humble protégé of the great house; an old

man, somewhat ridiculous in appearance, uniting to the most elaborate ugliness certain eccentricities and manias which, though they had gone much against him in his ecclesiastical career, had made him well known in all the country side. He received from Don Pedro a small salary for officiating every Sunday for the benefit of the servants and women of the house, and hearing them confess once a year — a pious formality that the millionaire kept up, with a view to protecting himself against peculation and domestic difficulties of various kinds.

Pepa Fúcar attended the service in the gallery communicating with the interior of the house; and with her, her waiting-maid and Monina, who could not understand why she was to be so quiet and good, and was on the point of lifting up her voice with a loud shout at the most solemn part of the service. Heaven only knows what she might have said if the nurse had not held her tightly, stopping her mouth, and threatening her that God would punish her by taking away her tongue. This had the desired effect, and Monina sat patiently till the end.

Pepa Fúcar knelt on a stool and leaned over the front of the balcony. Who can guess what was in her mind during that solemn hour, or for what, in truth, her aching soul petitioned?

The service ended, every one left the chapel, but Pepa remained in her place without moving from the attitude she had taken up from the beginning. With her head bent over the cushion and her face half-hidden

in her folded hands she had not breathed a word or a sigh. When, at last, she looked up and prepared to rise, she gazed fixedly at the altar without any definite expression on her face; the cushion was wet with her tears, as though a jug of water had been spilt over it. She left the chapel and went towards her rooms; she was silent and grave, her eyes were red, her lips parted as if she must suffocate if she could not draw a deep breath. At the door of her own room she met her father.

Don Pedro, though he had not been present in person at the service, had looked out on to the chapel through a little window in the wall to the left, which opened from a passage in the house, and was screened by a figure of St. Luke the Evangelist. From thence Fúcar could note that all his household were present and that none were missing; he could admire the magnificence of his private sanctuary — *la cathédrale pour rire*, as our ribald jester called it — which in his eyes was "a gem among basilicas" and "full of character." Indeed, it would have deen difficult to refuse that modicum of praise to the grand Christian scheme of decoration worked out by one of the chief scene-painters of the capital.

But we have reason to believe that the good man's mind rose above this to a loftier range of ideas. He was deeply troubled that day, and no doubt, as he put his solemn face out of the opening in such a manner that it might have been taken for that of an Evangelist or a Father of the Church, his feelings were reverent

and prayerful, and he craved something of the Creator. Still, this is mere hypothesis and devoid of foundation; it is put forward here for what it is worth, to fill up the vacuum which must exist in a total absence of data.

This much, at any rate, is certain. He stopped to say to his daughter:

"Every one was there."

"And how is she this morning? Do you know?" asked Pepa in a voice so husky that it sounded as though her lungs, in their scorching thirst had consumed the air they breathed.

"Be hopeful, my child. The unfortunate woman passed a quieter night, and she is better, Moreno tells me."

"So that she will recover. . ."

"It is very probable. . . ." said Don Pedro, but the indifference of his tone showed that he was thinking of something else. "Really, my child, it seems as though God were piling every calamity on us at once!"

As he spoke the poor gentleman could not control his feelings. He held out his arms to his daughter who threw herself into them, and exclaimed in a voice choked with agitation: "Child of my heart — my jewel! How unfortunate you are!"

Pepa shed on her father's shoulder the few tears she had saved from the Mass. Don Pedro, commanding himself, said with an effort: "But we must not exaggerate. — Nothing is positive. — To-morrow. . ."

Pepa went into her own room and her father retired to his, where, for the twentieth time, he read and re-

read a number of letters and telegrams which had made a deep impression on a mind usually as bright and clear as the spring air and sunshine.

CHAPTER VIII.

LEON ROCH PAYS A VISIT.

ACTING on a generous impulse, and being desirous of fulfilling the promise he had made to his wife, Leon Roch set out for Madrid and went to the church of St. Prudencio in search of Father Paoletti. Nothing could be more unlikely than that he should set foot in such a place, and when the serving-brother had asked him to wait in the bare parlour, he had leisure to reflect on the matter and on himself, with a sort of incredulous surprise, feeling as though either the place he was in or he himself must be the creation of a dream. The man who vows that he will never cross the threshold of some particular door must be either very foolish or very proud, or incapable of discerning that the swift turns of life bring us in front of those portals — open them —— and push us in; and we do not even think of escape.

Leon had not had much time for these reflections when a priest stood before him; a singularly small man of middle age, with a tiny, pale, boyish face, and such

large inquisitive, piercing eyes, that, in fact, he seemed all eyes. The deliberateness of his gait contrasted strangely with the smallness of his person; his steps were measured, even stately, with a firm, slow tread such as might result from constantly wearing shoes soled with lead. Paoletti bowed to his visitor with elegant politeness, and Leon, who was in no mood for ceremony, briefly explained his object. Paoletti, seating himself in front of the weary infidel with the calm tenacity of a humble believer, listened to him with the benevolence of a father confessor, cast down his eyes, knit his fingers, and twirled his thumbs — his hands it may be noted were as slender and delicate as those of a fine lady.

"Let us go," he said looking up and stopping the rotation of his thumbs. "I have heard of her journey to Carabanchel and of her illness, but I did not know that it was serious, nor that she had been carried to Suertebella. — To the house itself?"

"To the house itself," said Leon gloomily.

"I suppose then," said Paoletti with a subtle intonation, "that the marquis' daughter has come to Madrid with her darling child."

"She is to do so to-day."

"And you?"

"I do not purpose leaving María so long as she is ill."

"You impress me very favourably, Señor," said the Italian, giving Leon his hand with a hearty gesture. "At the same time your position with reference to that

blessed martyr is a strange one, and unpleasant for both of you."

"It is the singularity of our position," said Leon, "that made me decide on coming myself, that I might give you certain items of information which concern no one but me, and request your co-operation. . ."

"Mine?"

"Yes — to help me to carry out my arrangements, and get out of my difficulties as well as possible."

Paoletti knit his brows. He had risen to start at once; but he now sat down again, and once more began to twirl his thumbs.

"In the first place," he said in the tone of a man accustomed to drive matters home, "explain to me the motives which brought you here. It is strange enough that you should come to confess to me, surely?" And he smiled with sarcastic triumph in a way that to Leon was more offensive than open mockery would have been.

"To confess? — yes indeed!"

"No, no, Señor," said Paoletti with an affectation of sweetness which betrayed his Italian blood, "I do not expect you to confess — far from it! you will neither lay bare your conscience, nor retract your errors. You will only tell me what I know already — what every one knows. And all in order that I may help you. . ." And the priest ended his sentence by quoting the reports diffused by Pilar de San Salomó's gossiping circle.

"In all that there is a little truth and a great deal

of falsehood," said Leon. "It is false to say that Monina is my child; it is false to accuse me of such a connection with Pepa Fúcar. That I love her is true — and that every kind of love for my unhappy wife is dead within me. I have no feeling left for her but calm regard, and a dispassionate respect for her virtues which I fully acknowledge."

"Regard, respect!" said Paoletti. "Appreciation of her virtues! . . . This, Sir, is something. The pure and noble soul of María Egyptiaca deserves more, much more, it is true; but if we might hope that your regard and respect would develop and expand. . ." Again he took Leon's hand in his own which was as white and cold as marble — "we might bring about a reconciliation."

"Impossible!" said Leon. "Utterly, totally impossible. A little while since it would have been easy — but what effort did she make to effect it? — You ought to know."

The little man looked at the ground and nodded affirmatively.

"Of course! you know all about it!" said Leon bitterly. "My wife's conscience-keeper, the ruler of my household, the master of my married life, who has held the sacred chain in his hand and could bind or unloose — the man whom I see now for the first time since he came to see my hapless brother-in-law, Luis Gonzaga, who died in my house — this man who, though it is no earthly concern of his, has secretly disposed of my happiness and of my life as a master does of his purchased

slaves. — You, I say, must of course, know everything."

"This worldly tone of haughty philosophy is well known to me too, Señor," said Paoletti, in a tone of apostolic reproof. "If you wish me to meet you on that ground and to confute you utterly I will do so."

"No — I did not come here to argue. The horrible struggle is over — I am beaten, after having risked honour and delicacy, after fighting with skill, nay, and with fury. My opinions were settled long since, and cannot now be altered. This is not the moment for discussion; we are in presence of a terrible fact."

"María then is dying?"

Leon told Paoletti of his wife's visit to his lodgings, and of the scene which culminated in the fainting fit and subsequent illness of the saintly María.

There was a pause; then Paoletti said severely:

"It is clear to me that María loves you, and that you are the real traitor to the contract — guilty to-day as you were yesterday and from the beginning. Without further knowledge of the facts, I cannot pronounce on the step taken by my beloved daughter; but such a step, such a proceeding, taken as it stands, argues that she still loves you, and that her tender soul is full of sweetness and kindness for a man who is wholly undeserving of them."

"You, who know everything, know very well that my wife no longer loves me; and if those who are incapable of judging of a pure and noble feeling choose to give the name of love to a sentiment that has no

title to it, I shall at once assert myself as the sole judge of my unhappy wife's feelings, and declare that they do not satisfy my demands, that I repudiate them, and put them out of court in deciding on the question of separation or reunion."

Paoletti stood lost in thought.

"There is no fundamental and moral bond between us," Leon went on. "María and I are two separate souls: in my mind I see her and myself as the very idea incarnate of divorce."

"Yes — a group of statuary — a work of art!" said Paoletti, a lightning shaft of malice flashing across the dark cloud of his austerity.

"Well, yes — a work of art — which did not originate spontaneously, mark you, but was somebody's doing, somebody's work. My wife does not love me. I believe she might have loved me as I hoped, if the grave faults of her character, instead of diminishing and vanishing under my authority and tenderness, had not become more marked under alien influences. She does not love me; I do not love her. Consequently any reconciliation is out of the question."

"You cannot say," added the priest, with some severity, tempered however by tolerance, "that I have not listened to you with patience."

"Patience! I have had much longer patience!"

"Even those who have it least retain with it a touch of the Christian about them, caballero. — Then the long and short of it, Señor de Roch, is that you do not love your wife and she does not love you — you re-

spect and regard her. — But what is the upshot of it all? Or to put it plainly, what did you come here for?"

"María begged me to fetch her confessor. Far from opposing her I consented with pleasure."

"Then let us go at once!" said Paoletti rising.

"The most important thing is yet to come," said Leon laying his hand on the priest's robe. "You, with your perspicacity will at once perceive that I need not have come myself merely to fetch you. I came to tell you what no one else could tell you. Consider in the first place that her mind is the part really affected."

"I see."

"I ought to tell you that I honestly desire that she should recover," said Leon with firm composure. "I call God to witness that this is the truth: I hope and wish, without any kind of mental reservation, that my wife may live."

"I perfectly understand; you wish that she should get well again — that her nervous excitement should be soothed and removed, and to that end nothing must be suggested to her that can remind her of the cause of her illness. Comforting and pleasing ideas must be kept before her, to help her to disentangle the confusion caused by her indignation and unsatisfied passions; my spiritual guidance must be qualified by a certain infusion of worldly tact, so as to foster her illusions and conceal the sad truth, — the father-confessor must be to some extent a physician, allaying jealousy and encouraging hope, so as to clutch back, as it were, the life

that is fluttering to escape — that will escape, beyond recall, if the mental excitation that has imperilled it is not promptly banished."

Leon admired the confessor's sagacity.

"Very good," Paoletti went on; "I will do my best. I cannot pledge myself without knowing more exactly in what spiritual frame of mind my beloved daughter may be."

"María is at Suertebella."

"So I understand."

"She must on no account be made aware of it."

"Well — let that pass — " said Paoletti looking at the ground and screwing up his mouth. "It is a subterfuge which I hold excusable."

"She insists on displaying the affection which now — rather late in the day — she feels for me."

"Nor does that seem to me blamable. It may be allowed, considering that you think very little of her affection."

"While María is ill she must not be allowed to fancy that I care for any other woman."

"Stay, stay," said Paoletti, putting up his white hand as if to screen himself. "This is going too far. I have slipped some rather thick threads through the eye of the needle but the camel, my dear Sir, the camel is too much for me. That is a gross imposition."

"It is common charity."

"Truth forbids it."

"Her health requires it."

"A mere physical necessity to which we must not

attach too much importance. My saintly daughter will die as a Christian should, contemning the baser and more worldly passions."

"It is always our first duty to guard against death."

"Always, if we can do so without baseness. Am I to allow that angelic martyr to believe in her husband's innocence when she is actually under the same roof as her rival? I will grant you that there may be nothing existing to insult or injure her while she, the unhappy wife, is breathing her last. Still, the frightful fact remains. — I will tell her nothing unless she asks, but if she questions me — and she will, she will!"

"You are right!" exclaimed Leon struck by this solemn appeal. "It is a farce, equally unworthy of her and of me. The truth terrifies me — the lie disgusts me; but the truth is certain death, and the lie possible recovery. — Do not come to Suertebella. I will find a priest — anybody — the vicar of the parish, or the house chaplain."

He was leaving the room when Paoletti called him back in a conciliatory tone.

"You must be fully aware," he said, "that the presence of no other confessor will have the same effect as mine. If you will pledge yourself not to interfere in any particular, I will go with you with pleasure, to comfort and help the hapless sufferer. Nay, more," he added with a burst of feeling, "I may tell you frankly that I earnestly wish to go. She is so saintly, so admirable! I not only admire and respect her — I look up to her as a superior being."

"And what will you tell her?"

"What it is my duty to tell her," replied the Italian fixing a pair of eyes on Leon's face, which might have been a hundred pairs. "It strikes me as strange that a man who declares that he had thrown off every matrimonial tie, should trouble himself so much about his wife's conscience."

"I am not anxious about her conscience, but about her health," said Leon who was getting very weary.

"You tell me you do not love her, nor she you?"

"Yes."

"But it is her person — her mortal part, that a man may claim, not her exquisite conscience."

"Quite true," said Leon, draining the cup. "I leave her conscience to you, who have made it. I have no wish to put in a claim for the monstrosity."

"I forgive you the word," said Paoletti looking down. "Now Señor — Yes or No."

"Do you intend to kill her?"

"I!" and then, with a sigh, he added: "We will ask her who it is that has killed her?"

Leon's heart sank within him; after a moment's reflection he stamped his foot. A stamp sometimes strikes out an idea as a spark may flash from an iron shoe. Leon had an idea.

"Let us go, at any rate," he said. "I will leave so delicate a matter to your own conscience."

"And to prove worthy of your confidence," said the priest, unable to conceal his satisfaction, "I may promise you to reconcile truth and prudence as far as

lies in my power, and to do my utmost not to agitate the last hours — if the Lord so wills it — of my precious daughter in the Church. I am perfectly certain that my presence will be the greatest comfort to her."

"Come then."

"I am at your service in an instant," said Paoletti, hastening as much as he could with his heavy step to fetch his hat and cloak. But pausing in the doorway he observed: "it is very early; you, perhaps have not had breakfast. Will you have some chocolate?"

"No thank you," said Leon bowing. "No indeed."

And an hour later they got out of the carriage at the door of Suertebella.

CHAPTER IX.

A PARTING.

THE penitential mass had been celebrated, and Paoletti had gone into the room where his saintly daughter lay dying in alternate torments of fever and doubt, when Leon, hurrying from room to room, went in search of Pepa. He found her at last in Ramona's room. He had something very important to say to her and it might be supposed that Pepa was expecting this, for she was standing breathless, with her eyes fixed on the door, listening for his footstep, and as he entered she went a few paces towards a recess in the room, suggesting to him by the expression of her steps — for steps, too, have a language of their own — that they would talk more at their ease there than anywhere else. Monina ran to meet him and threw her arms round his legs, looking up in his face. He took her up, and the child, finding herself perched so high, began teasing him to admire the artistic beauties of a small clay vase with a handle and spout, a recent gift from the priest of Polvoranca, and then amused herself by holding on to his ear.

"Monina, be quiet — do not be troublesome," said her mother. "I know — yes I know what you have come to say. — Child be quiet; come to me."

She took Monina from Leon's arms and held her in

her own. "You need not tell me; I understand — I know — I must go away. I had made up my mind to it, even if I were forced to leave without seeing you."

"I appreciate your delicacy," said Leon. "Yes, go to your house in Madrid, and for the present forget my existence."

"That I can hardly do. — Child, you are choking me," said Pepa to Monina who was now pulling her mother's ear. "Get down and run away. — But I will go, without even asking when I am to see you again. I dread to ask and I feel for you in having to give me a reply."

Leon looked down and said nothing. There was not a kind word, a friendly formality, a common expression of hope even, which, on his lips, would not require a criminal accent. Silence seemed to him more decorous than any protestation of purity of purpose. They both were speechless for some little time, not daring to look at each other, each dreading to read the other's face and knowing that it would reflect his — or her — own feelings.

"Ask me nothing — tell me nothing — do not utter even a name that can appeal to her," Leon said at length. "Keep your heart full of generous feeling, and dismiss all hope."

Pepa wanted to say something, but her voice was so tremulous that she could not: "Nothing will be left me," she thought to herself, "nothing but the old dreary miserable thought: she will pray and pray — and live; I, hoping and still hoping, shall die."

Leon who seemed to read her thoughts in her contracted brow, said, looking into her face:

"It is in critical moments that the generosity or selfishness of a soul is revealed."

Pepa was trembling in every limb; she propped her head on one hand, and looking down at her knees, on which Ramona's tiny fingers were playing a tune, she said:

"I do not know whether mine is generous or selfish. I only know that I shed many tears just now in praying that God would let no one die for my happiness. How bitter our prayers can sometimes be! How cruelly our thoughts can torture us in the effort to prevent the flowers we must pluck and cast out turning into snakes! I have prayed more to-day than in any one day of my life before; but I cannot be sure of having prayed rightly and from a pure heart. The battle raged within me; I believe that the words I used had a different meaning every minute — that the name of God meant the Devil — that love meant hate, and life stood for death. The feeling and the thought were struggling for the mastery and each tried to find expression in words. — I did not really pray, I was not really good; and yet, indeed, indeed, I meant to be. I am so much a woman, so little of a saint. — But I shall not feel so wicked when I have found courage enough to pray clearly and boldly that we may both die — then everything will come right. . ."

She rose.

"In short," she said, "I am going. You know that my only joy in life is to obey you."

"Thanks — thanks. . ." murmured Leon, taking up Monina.

"Say good-bye," said Pepa, fixing a tender gaze on the child and the man who held her.

Leon held the little girl in a close embrace and kissed her again and again; such demonstrations of affection, he reflected, could hardly be deemed a scandal when bestowed on this angel-baby. He carried her up and down the room two or three times to conceal the emotion which, rebelling against every moral effort, was too legible in his face; and though he did not glance at the mother, she, sitting in her corner, might be sure that he was conscious of her presence. Passion has the keenest sight, and wonderful skill in discovering the thoughts of the object of its devotion, in assimilating them and extracting nutriment from this exciting but ethereal food.

As to the unhappy man himself, never had he so deeply felt as at this moment the irresistible charm of this sweet little creature — the child of a woman who was not his wife, and of a man whom he detested. He felt as if it would be impossible to part from this treasure and live — not that it was his, though he had accustomed himself to regard it as very much his own. His love for the child was as inseparable from the image of its mother as two stars that give but one light. It was an adopted affection which usurped in his solitary soul the vacant hearth and warming fire that ought to have

been for another. Was it his fault if in his weary journeying across the waste these two faces smiled upon him, one all dimples and the other all love, brightening the melancholy horizon of life and encouraging him to walk on, even when his strength was failing him, and he stumbled over the stones and thorns. In Pepa he had found affection, gentleness and a confiding nature—a mysterious promise of the peace he had dreamed of, the happiness he had so vainly and so painfully sought. It was the ideal family, with every human element in it except, alas! legitimacy; and the very fact of its being only a vision and not a reality, gave it added enchantment and greater attractions. Pepa's passionate devotion, and the tenacity which made her give it the preeminence over every other feeling, far from causing him any anxiety, altogether bewitched him; he saw in it the offering of her whole heart without reserve, the incalculating generosity which prompts a soul to abandon itself wholly without any concealment, without cloking its faults or veiling a single thought. Those who have been beggars for love cannot repel that which flows in their way, though the tide be too strong and boils and foams. At the same time he felt a sort of pride and pious emotion as he saw that this noble heart, without ceasing to be duteously religious, was nevertheless his, by a supreme law of humanity; and feeling himself so beloved—so completely the lord and master of her thoughts he could do no less than give his heart wholly to her. That secondary and long-past affection that he had known before the dawn of the glory in which they

now saw each other faded into nothingness, as the stars do at sunrise.

However, this was not the moment for such reflections. Leon set the child on her mother's knee and said:

"Not another instant! Good-bye. If I find it necessary to explain your absence to your father I will venture to tell him all about it."

"I will tell him myself."

And they precipitately left the room by different doors.

CHAPTER X.

BREAKFAST.

THE historian does not feel it a serious lapse of duty not to have mentioned already that the Tellerias flew to Suertebella as soon as they heard of María's serious illness. It is so much a matter of course that the reader will have taken it for granted, though this truthful narrative has not spoken of it in so many words. A thing which it is necessary to state, in case posterity — always inquisitive and impertinent — cares to know, is that on the morning of that eventful Tuesday — the day of the penitential mass, of Paoletti's visit, and of Pepa's departure — the marquesa with her husband and Polito, heard, with blank astonishment, this emphatic decision pronounced by Leon Roch:

"You cannot see María!"

"Not to-day even? I can hardly believe my ears!" exclaimed Milagros, unable to command her indignation. "To forbid a mother who has come to see her sick child!"

"And me, her father!"

Polito said nothing, but whipped his trousers with the cane he held in his hand.

"What reason can you have for such a proceeding?"

"I can find a reason when I want to give one," said Leon.

"I demand to go in and see my daughter, to nurse her, sit with her. . ."

"I nurse her and sit with her."

"And you give us no reason, no explanation of such atrocious cruelty, Good God!" exclaimed the marquis looking solemn — which is as much as to say that he looked very comical.

Leon enlarged on María's extremely delicate mental condition, and of his fears of the consequences of some indiscretion if he allowed her family to see her.

"Is she alone now?"

"Her confessor is with her."

The marquesa drew her son-in-law aside. "Really," she said, "I could not have believed that you would go to such an extreme. Tell me, explain to me all the horrors that have taken place here . . . Ah! my poor unhappy daughter does not even know, I daresay, that she is under the same roof as her husband's mistress . . . And you are afraid lest I should open her eyes, lest she should learn the truth from my lips — for from me she always hears the truth, spontaneously and naturally — for I do not know how to act, how to affect anything."

"No madam, I am not afraid," said Leon, only anxious to end the discussion. "But you will not see your daughter till she is quite well again."

"And what right have you over the wife you have betrayed and neglected? Or have you repented? Do you wish? . . ."

Her tone and expression suddenly changed. The angry scowl vanished like a cloud before the sun; her eyes sparkled with youthful eagerness, and the bird in her hat almost seemed to flutter in its gauzy nest.

"You have some plan for a reconciliation?" she said in bitter-sweet tones. "If so, I am the last person to wish to interfere with them. And if it is the outcome of sincere repentance. . ."

"I have no plan for reconciliation; it is out of the question," said her son-in-law shortly as the Marquis de Fúcar came into the room.

The master of the house, putting aside his cares and anxieties to fulfil the duties of hospitality and do the honours of his splendid house, came to make his bow to the Tellerias and condole with them on María's illness, begging them to consider the house at their disposal as long as it might suit them to stay. And as the melancholy cause of their visit was not a matter of a few hours, the open-handed gentleman, anxious to give his hospitality a character worthy of his European notoriety, begged the trio to remain the day — to pass the night — to stay the next day and the next night, for as long as they might wish; pressed them to breakfast — lunch — dine — sup; — to sit down and rest, to lie down and sleep — to make themselves completely at home, since here were tables, a larder, a cellar and servants — rooms enough to hold half the human race — horses to ride — flowers to pluck — etc., etc.

"Oh, thank you, thank you! How good you are!"

And María's mother pressed Fúcar's hand in speech-

less emotion. On such occasions, silence, a glance to Heaven, a silent clasp of the hand are more eloquent than a hundred phrases in praise of the generosity of those "who allow us to forget that we live in an age tainted by Materialism." The lady endeavoured to give her face the expression which, in her own opinion, was most becoming to her peculiar style of beauty, or rather to those faded remains of it which were not yet devoid of brilliancy when art, dress, sentiment, and judicious gesture set them in the most becoming light. In talking on indifferent subjects with her host she contrived to lead him into a sentimental vein with so much grace and persuasiveness that the stock-broker listened to her with enchantment.

Meanwhile Telleria had led Leon to a window, and was saying to him with ponderous dignity:

"Matters have come to such a pass, and your behaviour is apparently so preposterous, that I really must insist on your giving me a satisfactory explanation; otherwise it will be necessary to take it up on the ground. . . ."

"On the ground of honour!" said Leon sarcastically. "But you see it would be difficult for you and me to meet on that ground."

"A father-in-law, of course. — It is not that I have any wish to augment the scandal by adding another and a worse one. We have the greatest confidence in your gentlemanly feeling, and that Castilian nobility which we Spaniards can never wholly belie, even if we wish it. And if God should touch your heart, and you were

to effect a permanent reconciliation with my beloved daughter. . . ."

"That I shall never do."

"Very well. — Then. . . ." The marquis looked at his son-in-law with an eye which — considering the serio-comic aspect of the man — might fairly be called terrible.

"Then I know how to act."

They were in a Chinese boudoir full of figures frightful enough to give nightmares. On its painted walls, amid sporting butterflies, were gilt dwarfs and monsters, meditative storks, platforms with impossible stairs, trees that looked like hands, and faces that looked like wafers. The human figures did not stand on their ill-shaped feet; the trees had no roots; the houses were as much in the air as the birds. There was no solid ground; everything was suspended 'twixt earth and heaven on a background of shining black, like a sky of ink. The vacuous Chinese faces, looking on with stolid impartiality, seemed to be making their own reflections on the living scene, and the gold and silver butterflies amused the fancy with a sort of reflection on those dream-like walls, of the Marquis de Telleria's ambiguous smile. Chocolate-coloured bronzes stood in every corner and on every table; and those solemn idols — melancholy, hideous, dropsied and gloomy — might have been the embodiment of Don Agustin de Sudre's grievances and woes.

It was like turning over a leaf in a picture book to go from this Chinese apartment into the billiard-room,

an Arab divan, where Leopoldo with a tube for inhaling tar between his teeth, as if it were a cigar, was amusing himself with practising the game.

A footman came into the room.

"Did you ring, Sir?"

"Yes," said the young man without looking up, "bring me some beer."

The servant was leaving the room when Polito called after him to ask if breakfast would soon be ready.

"In a few minutes, Sir."

And he went on playing with the balls.

The master of the house had left the Chinese boudoir to his visitors, and a pompous, red-faced maître d'hotel, picked up in some Paris café, who might have passed for an English lord but for his smooth servility and obsequious nervousness, waited on the lady to take her orders.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "A mere trifle — anything will do for me. — Have you any potted shrimps? No? — never mind. But I cannot eat anything smoked. A beef steak, not overdone."

"And do not forget," said her husband to this benevolent official, whose black frock-coat was emblematic of the Christian grace of hospitality. "Do not forget that we drink nothing but Sauterne."

Fúcar presently reappeared, still melancholy, but in a great hurry, proving that sorrows are not incompatible with an appetite. It was late and the whole party were in need of food.

The Tellerias and Don Onésimo, who made his appearance after they had begun, did honour — in gastronomic cant — to the marquis' cook. Milagros, to be sure, whether from fastidious elegance or because grief had spoilt her appetite, hardly tasted anything.

"Do not let your anxiety be too much for you," said Don Pedro, "you must try to eat something. I have much to worry me too — yet reason tells me I must eat. Make an effort, and do likewise."

The happy efforts of Don Pedro's self-command were amply proved by a slice of steak which he was carrying morsel by morsel to his mouth, plentifully seasoned with its own gravy, and butter and lemon. Milagros after her oysters, only tasted and minced at the food, but really ate nothing; while her husband ate of every dish, savoury or sweet, first gazing at them with a flattering smile and then paying them treacherous attentions with his fork. Truffles, sausages, and smoked tongue, with other trifles more filling than digestible, tempted him to make acquaintance with their charms.

"And Pepa?" asked Don Onésimo suddenly.

"At Madrid," replied Fúcar, not lifting his eyes from his plate, on which the remains of the steak might have represented the treasury of Spain so much was it shrunk in dimensions. A long silence ensued, interrupted at last by Don Pedro himself, who again remarked to his neighbour:

"My dear madame, my dear friend, it is our duty to control our feelings. — Besides, it is not a desperate

case, María is better to-day. — What, tears? Come, come, just half a glass of Sauterne."

The marquesa did not refuse. When she had swallowed the wine she said:

"We shall see if my tiger of a son-in-law will allow me to see my daughter this evening."

Fúcar, anxious to avoid such a critical subject, spoke of a report he had heard that Polito was about to marry a rich Cuban heiress, whose family had lately settled in the capital with all the ostentation and *éclat* of an enormous fortune. The marquesa acknowledged the report, and Leopoldo indirectly confirmed it with a great deal of the false modesty that cloaks vanity. The rumours were true as to the young man's pretensions and daily pursuit of the young lady on horseback or on foot; but, in spite of these attentions, the engagement was purely mythical, with nothing real about it but the marquesa's vehement ambition of seeing her son possessed of a handsome and unencumbered fortune. The young lady's family, named Villa-Bojío, though they were good friends of his mother's were averse to Leopoldo as a suitor; still, their opposition was not very vehement, and Milagros laboured in silence, with all the diplomacy and finesse of which she was mistress, to turn this golden dream into at least a silver reality.

Presently, the subject being exhausted, she rose from table, and a servant offered the gentlemen the finest cigars the world produces. This article — to speak commercially — was the very choicest of all

the good things in the millionaire's house. His correspondents at the Havana sent, for his private use, the pick of their best, in return for the magic arts he employed to coax the government into making the rest of the nation consume the very worst. Matches were struck and the smokers smacked their lips.

"Polito," said Fúcar, "if you wish to ride tell Salvador to saddle Selika for you."

The smart rider of other people's horses needed no second bidding, but went down to the stables at once. Don Pedro sighed and signed to the poorer marquises — one noble by birth and one by his wits — who, following the millionaire marquis, seemed to offer him a sort of idolatrous worship, watching his glance, and burning the incense of his own tobacco in his honour. When they were alone Don Pedro confided to them in a low voice and with a melancholy face an idea — a piece of news — a fact. And thus, pouring the woes of his anxious soul into the ears of his friends, the worthy magnate found himself relieved; he breathed more easily, and could even throw off a little joke and laugh with that fat chuckle which we first heard at Iturburua.

"What a world we live in! What vicissitudes, what unexpected reverses! — Then there is that foolish tendency in human nature to exaggerate misfortunes and regard them as irreparable. . . ."

Onésimo, for his part, was completely stunned by the information his noble friend had communicated, He began to think that Don Pedro, utterly absorbed in

his complicated speculations and the metaphysics of loans, had failed to understand the bearing of this more vulgar dilemma. Telleria, on the contrary had listened to Fúcar's melancholy tale with a sense of sudden joy, and had an idea of his own on the subject — a happy idea. This he fondly turned over in his mind as he sat gazing at the painted walls of the dining-room, decorated with a perfect deluge of dead game and fish — partridges, hares, deer and lobsters, and a corresponding deluge of fruit, vegetables, gourds and butterflies. The carved oak panelling also displayed hunting-trophies and emblems — pouting masks blowing horns, dogs, birds hanging by the heads or heels; in short so many representations of the animal and vegetable kingdom that it might have been the palace of indigestion.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PRIEST LIES AND THE COCK CROWS.

WHEN María saw Padre Paoletti enter her room she gave a cry of joy. She looked at him with affection and then turned her eyes on Leon, expressing her gratitude for this concession — which in truth was little short of sublime — by holding out a hand to each. This simple and natural action, without a spoken word, was the epitome of her whole life, and might be regarded as the synthesis of my story so far as she was concerned. They asked her in the same breath how she was feeling, and the same answer did for both.

"I think I must be better — I feel brighter."

Leon patted her shoulder saying: "Then I will leave you."

"No, no," exclaimed Padre Paoletti with eager haste, seating himself at her left hand. "Doña María and I are not going to discuss matters of conscience. The doctor has satisfied us that her condition is not so serious as to require any immediate care for the concerns of her soul, nor is she strong enough for any long dissertation on spiritual things which, though most soothing and precious exhaust the attention. We will all three talk together for a little while; yes, Señor, all three of us — and presently, when her mind is

calmer and clearer — all in good time — my precious spiritual daughter can be left alone with me for a few minutes."

He ended with a smile which was reflected in María's face as the sea reflects the colour of the sky.

Paoletti, as will have been seen, was smooth-tongued and affable; he could be both sensible and agreeable; his appearance was modest and attractive, for besides a pleasant face he had the added charm of the clearest, sweetest and most pathetic voice that ever was heard. His speech was at once soft and firm, with a mysterious combination of two qualities that would seem to be antagonistic: precision and dreaminess. An after-taste of his native Italian, though partly effaced by the habit of speaking Spanish, gave it a slightly plaintive cadence which contrasted strangely with its vigorous inflections and strongly accented consonants. Well aware of his own skill in using the precious instrument that nature had given him, he took every advantage of it, polishing his language and suiting his words to his ideas and his voice to his words with the greatest nicety. His love of sonorous superlatives made his language tiresome.

While he talked he gave free play to the brilliancy and mobility of his striking eyes; their various changes, I might say phases, of expression seconded the eloquence of his tongue. His glance seemed to prolong the impression of his words: indeed it went further than speech, where speech could not reach. It was to his voice what music is to poetry. Of course there was much art in the wonderful charm of these gifts; still,

the chief source of it was a natural grace, and a long habit of searching consciences, of reading faces, of surprising secrets by a piercing glance or by a clenching argument.

"From what our learned friend tells us," he said, "our beloved patient will soon be quite herself again. It has been a nervous seizure which will pass away, and her state will soon become normal. We are all liable to the treacherous effects of sudden impressions which raise a storm in the nervous system beyond the power of reason to control. The Devil — always on the watch, the flesh — rarely mortified as it should be, rise up and assault us, taking us by surprise. On one hand we have an illusion of the senses which not merely magnify, but distort every object, on the other a fevered imagination which wanders whither it ought not, and sees everything in hues of fire and blood. The judgment succumbs to a hallucination — a mere hallucination, my dear daughter. Then comes the reaction, generally after a severe attack of physical suffering, and we see things in their true light; we see that our motives were inadequate, that we made too much of some gossip — or perhaps calumny, that we have seen visions and dreamed dreams — yes mere dreams. — Well, we will talk all this over later. For the present try to rest, and bring your mind to a state of exalted contemplation and peace. — You seem very comfortably lodged here. I admire your husband's taste in retiring to such quiet quarters. I like Carabanchel immensely. Doña María, when you are able to get up again and your husband

takes you out — for of course you will take her out — you will see what splendid wheat grows in the fields about here. — It is a paradise for poultry too; you cannot walk a yard without treading on the chickens. — Well, this is sermon enough for to-day, Señora. We began with the soul and ended with poultry. Well well!"

At this moment they heard a cock crow.

"St. Peter's cock!" said Paoletti in a low voice to Leon. Then, looking quickly round at María, he went on:

"I began with thinking of your soul and ended with the cocks and hens in the village. Another time we will begin with the farm-yard and rise to Heavenly things . . . God be with you."

"But are you really going?" said María, sincerely distressed.

"I will take a little walk and get something to eat and come back later."

"On no account," said Leon. "You will eat something here."

"Thank you, thank you, Doña María," said Paoletti, bending over the lady with a very mundane bow and smiling familiarly. "Your husband is most kind. I have never seen him since that melancholy time when our dear Luis quitted this world for a better. It has given me great pleasure to see him to-day."

María looked at her husband with a mixed expression of kindliness and aversion.

"Do you know, my dear lady," he went on, "that

to-day, by the most extraordinary coincidence, I discovered something ?"

"What ?" asked María anxiously.

"We will talk of it by-and-bye — I do not want to fatigue you."

"No, do tell me," said María, in the plaintive tone of a child who begs for something it ought not to have.

"Well, then, I have discovered," said the Italian, lowering his voice as though he did not wish Leon to hear, "that your husband is not so wicked as he seems; that all you heard — all the thousand stories which I know Doña Pilar told your mother — are a complete mistake, a misapprehension — I am assured — do you hear me ? — I am assured that there never has been any such infidelity. . ."

María's eyes glittered with excitement and pride. These words, which, coming from him were as Gospel truth, fell on her tortured spirit like balm applied by angel's hands. She felt as though she were being lifted from a black abyss into the light and fresh air of a lovely day. Afterwards she brought mature reflection to bear on these statements and to test them severely; but for the moment the priest's words had an immediate effect on her penitential credulity. If Paoletti had told her it was midnight, she would sooner have doubted her own eyes than his statement. Without knowing what to say or how to express her satisfaction she gazed alternately at the priest and at her husband, clasping their hands.

"Yes, indeed," added Paoletti. "There is no ground whatever for believing him to be unfaithful. My friend here. . ."

But at this moment again they heard the cock crow, and the priest broke off as though his voice failed him. He recovered himself, however, and to change the subject said:

"So now my sweet friend, you have only to get well as soon as possible. Oh! what a beautiful service you missed yesterday! When you get out again we will show you some prints that came to us yesterday — and we have a fresh supply of water from Lourdes. — But I was forgetting; we have been eating the chocolate you sent us. I must thank our kind benefactress in the name of all the household."

"It is nothing — a trifle, God knows!"

"Doña Perfecta was quite vexed with us because we could not make use of her contribution. An angelic creature, Doña Perfecta! What a beautiful soul! And that poor Doña Juana. Last night she worried us to death, and even called us despots because we have forbidden the porter's wife to make coffee for her and the other devout women who rise very early to go to communion and want to breakfast directly after. But really the porter's lodge was a perfect restaurant on some Sundays."

The doctor now came into the room.

"There is a great deal of talking here!" said he, "I shall have to come in like a schoolmaster with a cane and command silence."

"I — not another word! I believe I have talked more than enough," said the confessor. "I am going to take a turn outside."

He drew Leon into the recess of the window.

"Well?" he said.

"Admirable," said Leon, who had fully appreciated the priest's dexterity — and again they heard the cock crow.

"I have denied my God! I have connived at falsehood!" said Paoletti with a smile that might mean compunction. "If that cock continues to warn me with that crow that seems sent by Heaven, I shall not be able to hold out in this treason to my Master."

"It is an act of charity," replied Leon. "A cock cannot be expected to understand that."

"She, and God, will forgive me I trust. I have never told her a lie or deceived her before — she has never heard me utter a word that was not truth itself, and she believes me implicitly."

Leon stood silent for a minute after these words, which revived forgotten pangs like a blow on an old wound.

The physician gave a most hopeful report of his patient.

"Do you hear what the doctor says?" asked the priest in an undertone. "A good report, my dear sir — we may feel sure that Doña María will be spared to us."

This possessive plural, used and repeated without the slightest intention to wound, was the cruelest sar-

casm that Leon ever endured in the whole course of his life. He had seen, and rejoiced to see, the miraculous effect of the priest's words on the hapless María; but this familiarity with his wife, though strictly within the limits of the charmed circle of spiritual affection, disgusted him excessively. It was one of the fateful moments of his life; he stood face to face with the overweening authority, the absolute and omniscient dominion with which he had been fighting in the dark during the long years of his married life. It saddened him and struck shame to his soul. Aye! That moral divorce of which he had often spoken, and which he felt divided them, had never been complete and final till this instant. Till now he had still cherished esteem, respect; but even these slender threads were now worn very thin, if not actually broken, and soon, very soon, they must give way.

Controlling all expression of this feeling he went to his wife's bedside and said:

"Señor Paoletti and I are going to get something to eat. Rafaela will sit with you till we return."

"Oh, yes! go and eat some breakfast," said María joyfully, and with a softer look in her eyes. "But do not be long, I want to see you, and to talk to you. — Do not forget that I must have you with me, that you are not to leave me for an instant. Now that we have the opportunity you will see what a scolding, what a sermon, we can give you — Padre Paoletti and I. I can see you already cowed and humiliated — poor man! Miserable atheist! — But make haste; I want

to see you. Look; to-night we will have that sofa placed here, close to the bed, so that you may sleep by my side; then I shall sleep more quietly, and if I should dream any nonsense I can put out my hand and touch you, and then I shall rest in peace."

"Very well; I will do all you wish," said her husband, torn in his mind while his heart was full of bitterness.

"And listen," said María holding his sleeve. "See that some one brings me to-day — at once — my rosary, and my crucifix, and all my books of devotion off the table in my room; all the books, every one, and the water from Lourdes, and my relics, my precious relics."

"Rafaela shall go to Madrid this afternoon and bring you everything."

"It is easy to see that this is an atheist's room," said the sick woman reverting to the impertinent phraseology which she had only forgotten under the pressure of acute jealousy. "There is not a single religious picture, not an image, nothing to betray that we are Christian souls. However, go to breakfast, go and eat. The good Padre has had no food to-day I daresay — poor man! Give him the best of everything — do you hear? The best. Confess your own inferiority and humble yourself before him. Talk to him of me, and learn to appreciate me better."

Leon could hardly conceal a bitter smile as he left the room; and once more that cock was heard to crow.

CHAPTER XII.

THE STRIFE OF WORDS.

As soon as Fúcar heard the solemn tread of Padre Paoletti's leaden foot on the floors of his house, he hastened to pay him the usual compliments, putting his house, his table, and his servants at his disposal — his carriages, chapel and treasures of art. It might have been supposed, from the lavish generosity with which he offered everything that could give joy and comfort to necessitous humanity, that he was lord and master over the whole created world. And bowing as low as his burly dignity would allow he expressed, by his polite subserviency, how inferior are all the riches and splendours of the world to the humility of a simple priest, who has no gala dress but his gown, and no palace but his cell.

Paoletti, who was an accomplished connoisseur, not only of the fine arts but of all the arts of life, complimented his host on the magnificence of Suertebella, thus giving the marquis a fair excuse for indulging his favourite vanity, which was to display the mansion, room by room, and do the duties of showman. The excursion was a long one and would have been enough to fatigue the strongest head, the gorgeous apartments contained such a miscellaneous collection of pretty

things. Padre Paoletti admired everything with much politeness, showing that he was a man well versed in collections and curiosities. Don Pedro, who talked like the reporter to a newspaper and praised up the mediocre and even inferior works, was apt to quote the price of certain objects — pictures bought of Goupil, or porcelains from some auction at the hotel Drouot, most of them mere good imitations.

"I am overdone, positively overdone with fine things," said he, looking into Paoletti's face and folding his hands with an air of resignation. "I am the slave of wealth, my good Padre. No one would think it, but in fact it is the most intolerable form of slavery. I really envy those who live at ease, with the freedom and independence that poverty gives; without the anxieties of business, with no banquet but what I could eat out of a bowl and no mansion but some cell or hut or cave!"

"But my dear Sir," said the Italian, raising his hand to his mouth to conceal a yawn, "nothing can be easier than to realize such a wish. To be poor! When I hear poor men sigh and wish they were millionaires, I laugh and sigh; but when I hear a rich man pine for a hovel and six feet of ground in which to rest his bones, I say what I take the liberty of saying to you: Why do you not retire among the hermits of Cordova? Why not exchange Suertebella for a recluse's cell?"

And he ended as he had begun, with a hearty laugh; but he yawned again, screening it behind his white hand.

"That is it — put in that way it sounds easy enough," said Fúcar, laughing too. "But — what of social ties — of our duties to the State, who cannot spare her most useful sons? But dear me, it strikes me — how careless I am! It is so late, and you have eaten nothing."

"Oh! never mind — do not trouble yourself."

"Never mind! What next? Even your sainted body must be fed."

"On a little plain chocolate — nothing more. It is a missionary's body and can endure much."

"Leon," cried Don Pedro to his friend, whom he spied passing across the next room, "I will order them to serve breakfast in the Hall of Hymen. Then you will be close to your wife: and you, Señor Paoletti, will not care for the bustle of the dining-room; all the party are breakfasting in there . . . Bautista, Philidor!"

Hailing his Spanish servants and his French major-domo, the marquis made the whole household stir in the service of his guests. The multitude and zeal of the domestics resulted in a general clatter; hasty steps echoed over the inlaid floors, and on all sides the clinking of bottles and glasses was heard on metal trays, and the rattle of plates — welcome sounds to the hungry but courteous visitor, while the fragrance of stewed and fried meats pervaded the passages and rooms, as incense floats from chapel to chapel in a church.

The Hall of Hymen, so called because, in the middle of it, stood a group personifying marriage — two figures clasped in each other's arms holding two

torches of which the marble flames burnt as one — was quite close to the room which we may call María's; but it did not adjoin it. A table was laid at once, and Leon and the priest sat down.

"*Consommé*," said Leon pointing to a tureen full of rich soup. "It will be very good for you," and he helped him to a large plateful.

"I have been thinking," said Paoletti when, after a few spoonfuls, he was recovering from the exhaustion he had been suffering under for one hour past, "that in the whole course of my life — not a short one, nor free from strange conjuncture — I never have seen such a picture as we two compose at this moment."

"What picture?"

"Ourselves — you and I eating together. Nothing is the outcome of chance; God alone knows what divine purpose our strange meeting may be destined to work out. What wonderful changes, even in the highest destinies, have been wrought before now by the meeting — apparently fortuitous — of two persons! Reflect upon it, my dear Sir: sometimes a few minutes thought, or some incidental remark may suffice to throw a vivid light into the soul, and meanwhile. — No, no, thanks; no highly flavoured dishes; none of the delicacies of modern cooking. — Have you reflected. . . ?"

"Will you have some wine?" asked Leon, much disinclined to follow the priest on the antipathetic theme of his observations.

"No, I never drink it. A little water, if you please,

and God bless the giver. Any fool, seeing us sitting opposite each other, would criticise you or me—: 'Look at that wretched priest making up to a free-thinker,' they would say; or 'Look at the infidel hob and nob with the parson;' not understanding that though we are eating a little bread and meat together truth can never come to a compromise with error, nor error ever forgive truth, her bitterest foe,—Strawberries? I never taste them—since truth puts error to shame; hence she flies before truth, hiding herself blindly in her own conceits, or filling her ears with the tumult of the world. — But you are not eating!"

"I have no appetite."

Paoletti had eaten but little; Leon hardly anything. Fixing his expressive eyes on Leon's face, the Italian said with startling emphasis:

"Señor Don Leon, of all the world you seem to me the most to be pitied. Our poor Doña María is not to be pitied; no, only to be admired. If she dies she will enter the realm of the blest wearing many crowns, and among them the crown of martyrdom; if she lives she will be an example to all women. She is a fair lily, combining the graces of beauty, purity and fragrance."

"Yes. She was, no doubt, such a lily," said Leon, turning very white, while his whole being quivered with excitement —"A lily which, in its purity and fragrance, invited Christian love and promised all the honest joys of life. . ."

"But it grew close by a thistle. . ."

"No," interrupted Leon. "A hippopotamus came and broke it down with its ruthless tread."

The padre's eyes grew bigger.

"She is a treasure of great price. . ." he said.

"She was a treasure of great price," said Leon, tying a knot in his napkin and drawing it very tight, "but with coarse passions and a nature at once visionary and sensual."

"A purifying hand was extended to cleanse away the dross. . ."

"A hand of ice — that snatched out the diamonds and left false stones instead."

"Why did the owner neglect his jewel?"

"When the thieves do not break in by the door, but mine underground, the owner does not discover them till they have stolen his gem. — They robbed her of her love, generosity and trust, and left me nothing but cold duty and moral proprieties. She was like a crystal fountain — they dried up the spring, the water became stagnant, and when I hoped to drink nothing remained but filthy sediment. By constantly flowing, the water, though somewhat bitter, would have grown sweet. But they stopped the current and a foul swamp was the result."

"Nay, the water is sweet and of wondrous power," said Paoletti with a seraphic look. "The mystic water, freely bestowed; the very essence of the soul: Divine Love. Where so precious a fount is found on earth it is only just that God should absorb it, and break the cup."

"Nay, the cup is just what has been left for me."

"A golden cup; the only thing that can excite the cupidity of a man devoid of faith. The miserable slave of 'Matter' can never crave that precious drink; his thirst cannot be allayed by spiritual love; it is only a form of avarice and can be slaked by the possession of the golden vessel — physical beauty."

"For you who know nothing of love but through sin — for you who never felt love but only hear of it, taking in at your ears the secrets of others who love, to you much of what concerns only the heart of man must be an inexplicable mystery. You see nothing in life but duties fulfilled and sins committed. This is much, no doubt, but it is not all. Only the man who has never drank at all can enjoy the insipid draught of mysticism, or the bitter savour of sin."

"Only the man who has never drank at all, and who nevertheless is not thirsty, can, by the blessed gift of intuition — which is one of the best graces of our náture — fully enter into all the emotions of true love, from the noblest to the basest. The man who knows everything can feel for everything. You, who abuse us so roundly, might have found friends in those whom you have believed to be your enemies, and peacemakers in your married life in those whom you regard as its disturbers."

"I refuse any such co-operation."

"What right have you to complain when you have yourself broken every tie? The mere circumstance that he chooses to consider himself outside of the pale of

the Church, deprives a man of the right of complaining of the pressure of a bond which is in its nature a religious one. 'I need no religion,' they say — 'I abominate it, I cast it from me; but I do not allow religion to defend itself against my attacks, I do not allow it to claim its own!"

"No — what I do not allow it to claim is mine."

"God will have the divine part. . ."

"And I demand the human part. . ."

Neither of the men finished his sentence.

"The human part is a convenient loop-hole," said Paoletti sharply, "through which a man sneaks into unfaithfulness and adultery, leaving the martyred wife alone and without protection."

"But the divine part puts the martyred wife under the protection of those who drink of the spiritual fount!"

"What would become of her if it were not so? the wretched soul must become corrupt from contact with a soul already corrupt."

"I never tried to corrupt her: I tried to save her by persuasion, almost always by kindness, sometimes by authority verging on tyranny. . ."

"You confess it — you confess that you were despotic!"

"Not such despotism as it might have been in vulgar hands. Some would have punished, I simply prohibited — and my prohibitions were constantly disobeyed — I could not have insisted without going to cruel lengths."

"And the dove fled from the talons of the vulture," said Paoletti with a sort of honeyed sarcasm.

"Yes. — And fell into those of the vampire who sucked all the sweetness out of my existence. I was teaching my treasure to trust me and you taught her to loathe me; I never argued against her beliefs, I made no objection to her having a judicious confessor—but her sanctimonious friends disgusted me. And my enemy was not a man but a whole army — a host that called itself celestial, and that has made itself formidable by gaining allies in bigots and hysterical wretches who believe themselves to be saints. I tried to fight in the dark, but in the dark I was cut in pieces. An act of hypocrisy such as has saved many a weak man, would perhaps have saved me. She, poor deluded soul, bound over to mysticism by promises of celestial joys, proposed terms of peace; nothing could be easier —: 'Abjure your mad scepticism; come into our fold,' she said. This was what they wanted! But I would not purchase peace by an imposture, nor try to capture the heart that was slipping away from me by false professions of faith. I would not add another to the host of hypocrites who make up the greater portion of modern society. — Time went on; the struggle had to be fought out. My sincerity exasperated my wife's spiritual advisers: the ministers of interference and of misapplied piety.

"But after all, what does it matter? I would rather be infamous in your eyes than in my own."

"A man who fears any eyes but those of God should never speak of such things."

"And if we are not allowed to talk, what are we allowed to do? You pile a mountain on to a hapless wretch and may he not groan when he is crushed?"

"Lift up your hands and hold off the rock that weighs upon you."

"I cannot, I cannot. It bears the burthen of centuries, and is formed of the bones of a thousand generations!"

"Poor insect!" said Paoletti ironically. "I declare nothing on earth moves me to pity so much as a philosopher. For my own part I can only beg you to express yourself with perfect frankness on all your feelings. . ."

"With frankness?"

"With perfect frankness, sparing me no hard words."

"When the storm overtakes me and lashes me and fells me to the ground, what am I to think of that terrific power? can I stop it, can I punish it, can I even insult and abuse it? What can I say that will hurt it, how can I defend myself against so formidable a foe — who is but empty air?"

"Dear Sir," said Paoletti folding his hands with an expression of compunction: "I, as a humble but outraged priest, pity you and forgive you." And then his slow, leaden step sounded across the floor as he made his way back to the sick-room.

CHAPTER XIII.

ICES, HAM, CIGARS AND WINE.

THE news of María's improvement flew from room to room, and down to the stable where Polito was lounging about; to the hot-houses where Telleria and Onésimo were inspecting the pines and making sapient observations on the progress of acclimatisation — which, according to Don Joaquin, must, in time, lead to a vastly increased production of taxable material; to the aviary where Milagros was lost in admiration at the piping of the little birds, an amusement very much to her taste; and was everywhere received with joy. A number of visitors besides the Tellerias had come to make enquiries, and each and all were met with the same obsequious politeness on the part of the marquis. Some only left a card and went away, but more intimate friends staid awhile to condole with Milagros, who, after making the tour of the garden, went indoors to recover from her fatigues on a sofa in the Chinese drawing-room. There, amid the bronze idols and sombre porcelains, she breathed forth her complaints and lamentations.

"That monster cannot make any objection now to my seeing my daughter . . . Here!"

A footman, who was going through the room with a tray of glasses and liqueur, paused at the call.

"Bring me an ice."

"What flavour does the Señora prefer?"

"Pineapple if you have it or banana. Pilar will you have some?"

"I have this instant been fed with some cocoanut sweetmeat — plum-pudding — sherry, and I do not know what more! That worthy stone-mason Marquis tried to be revenged on me for all my jokes by stuffing me to death. He insists that I am to dine here, to ride in his carriages, use his horses and carry off all his camellias. We know well enough that the worthy broker has a good cook, good horses, a fine garden and a tribe of bedizened servants. — The cook, I may say, is not much to boast of, an apprentice from the Trois frères Provenceaux — I declare this gingerbread palace oppresses me more than I can say; it is for all the world like a pawnbroker's shop; or a livery coat figged out with gold lace, or . . . But, my dear Milagros, do you know that we have an important part to play? Shall we go into María's room? Shall the reconciliation be effected at once?"

The marquesa's eyes opened wider like the revolving light when it is growing broader; but they collapsed again as she said:

"The reconciliation! Oh, that, unluckily, is not in the programme."

"And Pepa — where is she?"

"At Madrid."

"It would be an awkward thing if she were to come to Suertebella. But I do not understand how María came here."

"My poor child was stricken down by a sudden attack. She was in a house where there was no furniture — no beds, nothing decent. Don Pedro had her carried here. I am truly grateful to him for his kindness! But that wretched son-in-law of mine — I cannot help it, I must just tell you. — Ah! here is the ice."

The lady had risen to her feet with some degree of maternal and womanly dignity; but she suddenly calmed down, and dropping into her seat again among the monsters, she proceeded to eat the ice which soon disappeared in the depths of her afflicted person.

Polito had come back to the billiard-room where he was playing with his friend Perico Nules.

"Here, Philidor," he suddenly exclaimed. "Just be good enough to order some one to bring me a little mild-cured ham, and a glass of. . ."

"Of sherry?" Polito hesitated, scratching his beard.

"No — you bother me. *Chateau Yquem.* If I could only do without this beastly tar; but I cannot, I choke directly . . . Stay, one moment *mon cher Philidor*, some ham for this gentleman too, or some smoked tongue and a glass of *Pajarete.*"

When they were alone Polito lifted his fingers significantly to his lips and said to his companion: "Smoke?"

"Yes, let us smoke," said the other taking his pipe out of his pocket.

"No man, not your own tobacco. There is a chest full of cigars. All the produce of *Vuelta Abajo* is in this house."

The worthy couple, using their cues as walking-sticks, made their way to a box which, by its insidious fragrance betrayed the superior quality and aristocratic brand of the cigars that lay packed within the cedar boards.

"Very good tobacco — capital!"

"Look here my boy, all this comes, beyond a doubt, from the wealth of the nation . . . We may as well lay in a stock." And he plunged his hand into the box.

"Come, this is going too far!" said Perico Nules somewhat scandalized at the proceeding.

"Nonsense! Let us sing like Raoul *chascun per se*," and he hummed the words to Meyerbeer's air, the Marquis de Fúcar's store of cigars diminishing perceptibly meanwhile.

"And, after all, what is all this that we see and touch — and smoke?" said Nules, striking a match. "What is the gorgeous and luxurious place where we now are? this magnificent room, with its fine Arabian tiles, the horses on which we were riding this afternoon, the pines in the hot-house, the pictures, flowers, carpets, vases. — What are they all? They are the juice, the savour, the very extract of our beloved native land — you understand? And as everything displaced by foul means from its natural position tends, sooner or later to return to it — just as animal organisms assimi-

late from nourishment the equivalent of what they lose by wear and tear, the obvious consequence. . . ."

Here the servant came in with the ham, and his presence postponed the inference.

"And as we ourselves are the country, or an integral part of it," said Leopoldo.

"The country is claiming its own again," added Nules attacking the food.

This humorous youth was the originator, according to trustworthy authority, of the ribald and malicious interpretation of the pictures and texts in the chapel.

"Wealth, my dear boy," he went on smacking his lips over the *Pajarete*, "works in a circle, you understand? It returns to the point it started from. — The State robs my father of half his income from Xeres in the form of taxes; Fúcar, under the happy impetus of a loan, robs the treasury of half a year's revenue; and I drink Fúcar's wine and smoke his cigars, thus supplying wants which my father fails to satisfy by reason of the heavy taxation. You follow me in my explanation of this circulation? But there are still a few cigars left in the case; if we leave them, the servants will smoke them."

"Heaven forefend! *Pietoso ciel!*" sang Leopoldo. "That would be too much! *In tal periglio estremo*," and again he hummed his Meyerbeer's.

"Oh! what luck!" exclaimed Nules, looking out of the window. "Here are the Villa-Bojío party — mamma and two interesting daughters." Leopoldo peeped out to see the ladies stepping out of a landau at

the front door, and his heart stirred in his breast with some little excitement — like the kernel of a "withered nut rattling within its hollow shell," as the wind sways the bough on which it hangs.

"Let us take them out for a drive," suggested Nules.

"To be sure, what fun! — Philidor," shouted Polito, "let us have a carriage out. — But come and meet them."

"We will drive them out to Leganes."

"There is nothing to see there."

"We can show them the lunatics."

CHAPTER XIV.

A NOCTURNAL VISIT.

THE improvement in the poor saint and martyr's condition continued all day; but in the evening she was worse again. María had a headache and became dull and melancholy. Paoletti had been with her most of the afternoon, but had talked very little, and only of unimportant trifles. Leon, too, had been in her room for some length of time, and more than once.

"Listen to me," María said to him. "I do not know whether my fancy is disturbed by fever, or whether it is an illusion of the senses but I feel. . . ."

"What do you feel?"

"As though somewhere — I do not know where, there were a number of people walking about. . . . It seems to me that I can hear a bustle of servants and the rattling of crockery — I even smell the steam of food which sickens me."

Leon tried to coax her out of these notions but could not succeed; she was not satisfied till Paoletti, whom she trusted as the incarnation of truth, said:

"My dear daughter, this noise and these smells are perhaps merely over-excitement. . . ." This time the cock did not crow.

"I must pray," said María. "But do not go away Leon, stay here. Seeing me so ill, I imagine you will

not laugh at me because I say my prayers. I want you to hear me, and to be silent and listen — it is your duty to do so. If you do not believe you can listen and be silent. Do not go, do not leave the room . . ."

"I am here."

"Sit down, and do not look at the floor, look at me. Padre Paoletti and I will pray; and you — there, close there — and keep quiet. Every word we utter will be a lash — but keep quiet and do not move, look at me — there, so; so that I can see you."

And taking hold of his hand she looked tenderly in his face.

"You ought not to try to pray," said Leon. "Our kind friend Señor Paoletti will pray — listen only, and do not exhaust yourself."

"Very well," said María, taking a medal which Rafaela had brought her from under her pillow. "Now, to please me, kiss this medal."

Leon kissed it, not once but again and again. María did the same; then she murmured:

"Mother of God! save my atheist; and if he will not be saved, save me, and so long as I live enable me to be faithful."

Quite unconsciously she had revealed her whole nature in this brief supplication. The sum total of her ideas was: "Let me be saved, even if to secure my salvation I must trample underfoot the first law of married life; while I neglect every human duty in order to aspire and rise to ecstasy, let my husband, the man whom the Church has bound to me, love me devotedly

and passionately, and never even look at another woman." In a word: she wanted for herself, as being in possession of the truth, the fullest liberty while he, as the slave of error, was to bear all the burthen.

The room gradually grew darker — sank into funereal gloom pierced only by the cadenced tones of the priest as he repeated the prayers. It was strange, but true; the voice which was exquisitely modulated in conversation sounded rather harsh as he went through the droning round of *Paternosters* and *Ave Marias*.

Rafaela brought in a light just as the Padre ended, and the sudden transition from the monotonous sound to the lighter tones of conversation was like coming out of a sepulchral vault into life and day. Paoletti, after a few cheerful words to his saintly daughter, took his leave, promising to return on the morrow. Leon, bent on politeness, conducted him as far as the "Hall of Hymen."

"God grant," said the priest with some acrimony, "that her health may allow of my telling her the truth. This farce is ceasing to be an act of charity!"

Leon watched the confessor as he carefully descended the steps and got into a carriage, and as he heard the wheels crunching the gravelled road across the park he turned to go into the house.

"The truth — the truth!" he said to himself. "Yes, let her know it and live! It is my sincerest wish."

The rest of the party were spending a gay evening in the tapestried drawing-room — so called because it was hung with such works of art, in which the faded

hues and ghastly faces seemed to represent a world of consumptive victims. Leon had no desire to join them; he went back to his wife. During the evening nothing occurred worthy of mention, excepting that the doctor, not yet quite satisfied as to the issue, insisted more stringently than ever on complete rest, and put a positive veto on prayers and religious excitement. It was about ten o'clock when María, after a little calm sleep became restless and eager to talk. Leon, in obedience to her wishes, had placed the sofa by the side of her bed and was trying to get some repose. But María began asking him a hundred questions about himself and others, mixed up with the old familiar homilies, the old impertinences that had so often annoyed him in former days: He was called an atheist, a hardened materialist, an enemy to God, a man of pride and sin—though all this vituperation was accompanied and sweetened by María's pretty hand coaxingly stroking the infidel's beard, patting his cheek or pinching his throat, so sharply indeed, now and then, that her husband exclaimed: "Oh! you are hurting me!"

"You deserve worse than that. — But much will be forgiven you if you only do your sacred duty by me."

After this there was a long pause when both seemed to be sleeping, but suddenly María awoke with a start saying:

"Come now Leon — which of us is more worthy?"

"Why you of course; there cannot be a doubt of that."

"Help me to remember. Did I really tell you that

I did not love you, and did you tell me that you did not love me?"

Leon was puzzled and did not know what to say.

"I remember nothing of it," he said at last.

"What do you mean? You do not remember? Did I dream it?"

"I do not remember. I have made it my business to cultivate oblivion."

"But do not leave me."

"I have not moved."

"Come closer — so. How pale you are and your eyes are hollow. Come quite close and lay your head by mine."

Then she fell asleep again, her hand still clutching her husband's hair, as painters represent an executioner holding the head of a traitor up to public view.

The sickly, tremulous glimmer of the night-light, in the porcelain shade with its opalescent and pearly transparency, throwing a broad quavering circle on the ceiling, gave light enough to cast ill-defined shadows of their forms and faces. The sad twilight, suggesting that which must prevail in Limbo, gave a doubtful solidity to everything in the room, and soothed the senses to a torpid state verging on stupor. Leon lay neither waking nor sleeping; fatigue kept him from thorough wakfulness and anxious thoughts prevented sleep. The night was far advanced when he heard a slight noise in the room, and looked up much startled, for it seemed impossible that any one should come in at that hour. His blood ran chill as he saw a form, a shape, a shade

slowly coming towards him. It looked no more substantial than an optical illusion caused by the mysterious light in the china shade. Happily he had no belief in ghosts. He wanted to examine the phantom, which he immediately perceived to be a living human creature, but he could not stir. María's fingers held his hair, and the slightest movement would have disturbed his wife who was sleeping peacefully. He raised his arm to gesticulate a warning as he could not express himself in any other way, but the figure paid no heed; it came up to the bed and leaned over it with evident curiosity, not unmingled with fear. Leon could feel himself enveloped, so to speak, in a gaze of melancholy pathos. His heart throbbed as violently as a maniac struggling in a strait waistcoat. He was furious — he dared not speak, dared not move to exorcise this nightmare visitation; he saw that the phantom — to give it this childish appellation — moved its head as if in reproach, or disapprobation, or despair. Then it fled hastily and incautiously, making more noise than at its entrance, and leaving a sort of chill on its passage, like that of a sudden draught of air.

María woke with a start.

"Leon, Leon," she cried, "I saw. . ."

"What? Do not talk wildly."

"I saw — and I heard a noise like that of a silk gown — some one running. . ."

"Compose yourself. No one has been in the room."

"But I saw it," said María, covering her eyes with

her hands. "I thought a woman went out at that door."

"Go to sleep again, and do not see and hear things that do not exist."

"Was it Padre Paoletti?"

"How could it be my child? It is midnight. — He will come to-morrow."

"Oh! I want him to explain it to me; no one can explain it but he."

She went to sleep again with her hands piously folded, thus leaving her husband's head free. Leon, finding it impossible to sleep when his mind was in such a turmoil, feeling sure too that he heard some movement in the adjoining room, rose with the greatest caution, and walking softly and slowly left the room. As he went into the next room he heard the sound — impossible to mistake for any other — of the swift rustle of a silk dress. He followed it from room to room, but the noise fled before him — like some prowling creature that feels itself hunted and flies to hide its prey in the darkness. At last, in a room called the *Incroyable*, the fugitive dropped exhausted into a seat. There was no lamp or candle in the room, but through a ventilator that opened above one of the doors a broad beam of light fell from the lamp that burned all night in the corner of one of the wide corridors. This partial and somewhat romantic light, though insufficient for reading, for looking at prints, or for examining the china, was enough to recognise, or even to study a face by, if need be.

Pepa Fúcar, for it was she who was flying through her father's house like a soul in torment, sat huddled in a chair with her face hidden in her clasped hands and bent down almost to her knees. She moaned rather than spoke:

"I know what you are going to say to me — I know; do not speak to me."

"For Heaven's sake!" murmured Leon standing in front of her. "How imprudent!"

"I will not come again; I will not do it again. I know I have no right — that it is my fate to be wretched and forsaken — always forsaken. I have nothing to complain of — I can demand no explanations — I dare ask nothing. Even to love you is forbidden."

Leon sat down by her side. She did not cease her heart-broken rocking, nor take her hands down from her face. But presently, drawing herself up as though to give herself courage, and conquer her heart by trampling it down — and she even stamped on the floor with her feet — she wiped away her tears with her trembling hands, for she was not collected enough to take out her handkerchief — nay, as a matter of fact she had lost it — and said with an effort:

"It is over — I am not wanted here — I feel so much, and I have no rights — I am a disgraced woman. Your wife might strike me and only be applauded for it. . . . Good-bye."

Leon pointed to the door, but he did not speak.

She looked at him with pathetic devotion, but sud-

denly lifting her hand she laid it on his head and with the strength of intense passion she grasped his hair and pulled him down. He was forced to bend — lower, lower; she held his head with both hands for an instant, and then she hit it — as if it were a thing she could break.

"It is my turn," she said in a broken voice — "mine, to — pull your hair!" Leon pulled himself up — half-angry, half-forgiving.

"Go," he said.

"Yes," she replied, "good-bye. I do not wish to bring disgrace upon you. I will go at once. My heart is bursting — it chokes me to cry and to run. Do not follow me."

She slipped a key into the lock of the museum door, which opened from one corner of the room they were in, and vanished in the darkness. Leon departed by the way by which he had come, returning to his post like a faithful soldier.

CHAPTER XV.

LATET ANGUIS.

In the course of that afternoon Don Pedro Fúcar had invited Doña Pilar de San Salomó — whom we have seen looking on at the interesting spectacle of her friend swallowing an ice in the Chinese boudoir — to go round the hot-houses with him, and cast a glance, by the way, at the English horses he had just had sent to him from a famous stable in London. The worthy money-dealer, the "product of his century," the noble who derived his patent, not indeed from battles against the Moors, but at any rate from contracts with good Christians, was well aware of the small estimation in which he was held by Pilar. Still, not content with having the exchequer of both hemispheres at his feet, he was very anxious to stand in the good graces of the initiated, so he overwhelmed his guest with attentions and civilities. Besides displaying with more than usual zeal all the splendours of Suertebella, he presented to her some of the treasures it contained: exotic flowers in costly vases, rare fruits, and, to crown all, some sacred relics from the altars in his chapel. With all his habits of politeness the moneyed magnate could not conceal that each gift cost him a greater pang than the last, and at length so far forgot himself as to sigh

deeply, gazing at the ground, as though he might there see written in mysterious characters — like the binomial theorem on Newton's tomb — the formula of a bargain or a loan which might bring the very earth we dwell on into the money safe of the Fúcars.

The lady, misinterpreting this disturbance of mind, ascribed it to the day's events, to Pepa's painful and compromising position, and the unexpected presence of Leon Roch and his wife. Satisfied that she was on the right scent, Pilar, as they returned to the house, expressed her thanks for all her host's attentions, and added:

"And your kindness is all the more striking when I reflect that you must just now be greatly troubled by all these rumours."

"And such rumours!" exclaimed Don Pedro with tragic emphasis. "You cannot imagine! . . . . You may fancy what they must be to make this mountain quake!" And he laid his hand on his breast to indicate that even that rock had its hidden springs of sentiment.

At five o'clock Don Pedro took his leave, after once more placing the house and all it contained at the service of the Tellerias. He himself went to Madrid to dine with his daughter, and was not to return till the next morning. Still, if anything serious required his presence he would come at any hour of the night. Happily María was much better and would no doubt recover. After greeting Gustavo, who had but just arrived, having been delayed by his parliamentary

duties and the responsibilities of his office, he left the house.

Pilar also had intended starting for Madrid, but she was detained by Gustavo who was very anxious to tell her Heaven knows what; however, the lady listened to him eagerly, and with the keenest enjoyment of some stupendous piece of gossip of very doubtful taste, but which gratified her curiosity and her malice. They walked out together in the garden, Pilar exclaiming from time to time with a peal of laughter:

"It is like a practical joke which at the same time is a kick or a beating! It is one of those providential dispensations which make the victim cry and every one else laugh. But in this case there is no call for pity or sympathy. Merciful Heaven! What a great man you are and how unfailingly ready to help every one! Why, you intercept the progress of evil by arranging things as cleverly as a novel writer, giving us a surprise that is positively alarming — but a surprise that compels us to turn to you and cry out: "Lord have mercy! Give us warning before you strike!"

This profane sally was followed by another burst of laughter; then she said saucily:

"I shall go there."

"You!— what for?"

"I should like to see their faces," said Pilar stuffing her handkerchief into her mouth; and she wiped the tip of her tongue as the tip of a weapon is polished after being dipped in poison. "I will find some pretext."

It was dusk by the time Pilar called for her carriage; she ordered the coachman to drive her to the Fúcar's house in Madrid.

She went in. Don Pedro and his daughter were just sitting down to dinner with Don Onésimo and Doña Vera. Fúcar invited Pilar to join them, but she excused herself, saying that she had only just time to give them the good news of which she was the bearer. She kissed Pepa, she gave her hand to Onésimo and then began to pet Monina.

"What is it?" asked Don Pedro.

"That María is really almost well again. And it is quite certain that a reconciliation would be effected — Milagros herself told me so. I am so glad! I cannot bear marriages that turn out badly. — My little Monina, will you not give me a kiss?"

"No," said Monina decidedly, turning away and covering her face with her little hands.

"Oh, silly, cruel child!"

"I do not love you. . ."

Repulsed on this quarter Pilar turned to Pepa, and glancing at her compassionately she said:

"Good-bye dear . . . you know I feel deeply for all your troubles."

She rustled out on Don Pedro's arm, whispering a few words in his ear which had the effect of a pistol-shot. As she parted from him at the carriage door, the lady fired a parting shot.

"I wished to warn you, that you might be on your

guard. Resignation, Señor Marqués, Christian submission is what is wanting."

Pepa meanwhile, lost in painful meditation, did not know what to think nor to what possible issue to look. Her spirit was torn by dark presentiments and wild conjectures. This news of a reconciliation had pierced her soul like a three-edged blade.

The quartette sat gloomily enough through the meal; to Pepa food was a nauseous mixture that she simply could not swallow, and her father hardly eat anything either. In the midst of her utter misery, Pepa, who had noticed her father's strange look of worry and vexation since the day before, saw that this evening he was almost beside himself. Don Joaquin too, the partner of all the marquis' secrets was irritable; what was happening?

"Ah!" said Pepa to herself, seizing on a notion sad enough in itself but at this moment a happy one for her; "My father must have suffered some great reverse of fortune; he is ruined perhaps, we shall be beggars."

This idea, gloomy as it was, comforted her. Her father's melancholy, in that case, had nothing to do with her personal griefs. What did she care for other interests, for all the money, all the bonds, all the securities, all the loans past, present or to come? That evening, Pepa might have passed close to all the stamped paper in the world piled up in a heap and set fire to on all four sides at once, and she would not even have cast a glance at the ruin.

After dinner, and when their friends had left them,

Pepa and Don Pedro withdrew to the room where Monina slept just as the little angel, despoiled of her clothes, was being put into the rosy paradise of innocent dreams. Don Pedro took his grandchild in his arms, and kissing her with even more tenderness than usual, said:

"Poor little dove! you shall never fall into the clutches of that vulture!"

"What is the matter Papa?—What is the matter?" exclaimed Pepa, adding her more urgent embrace to the soft clasp of Monina's arms round the marquis' bull-neck.

"Nothing, my child. Nothing. Do not be uneasy, do not let yourself be agitated; trust in me, and I will put everything right."

"But will not you explain to me? . . ."

"Certainly not."

"Has anything gone wrong in your business?"

"No my pet, no," said Fúcar repelling this conjecture with some indignation as casting a reflection on his dignity as a man of business.

"I have made ten millions clear by the last loan. Divest your mind at once of such a dismal idea!"

"But then. . ."

"It is nothing; do not worry yourself. Sleep peacefully and leave it to me to put everything right."

"And you are going out?" said Pepa disconsolately, as her father disengaged himself from the loving arms that held him.

"Yes, I have something I must attend to this eve-

ning. The Minister of Finance expects me. This miserable country does not find the last loan enough—it wants another."

"I am really most uneasy. What was it that Pilar said to you?"

"To me? nothing," said the marquis a little awkwardly. "Nothing but what you heard."

"She whispered something."

"No — at least I do not remember it. The reconciliation of our friend Leon with poor María seems to be a settled thing — that was all. I am glad, for it is altogether wrong that two persons of the highest character — a good husband and a good wife — should quarrel about a Mass more or less. It is perfect insanity. — Good-bye sweet-heart."

"Reconciliation!" exclaimed Pepa with flashing eyes.

The marquis, who did not happen to see her at this instant, took a few steps towards the door.

"Let us be thankful that those who are good can be brought together again," he murmured as he left the room. "But for the wicked there can be neither peace nor pardon. — May God forgive him!"

Pepa was about to speak, but the words on her lips were so tempestuous that she restrained herself. She sat a long time without stirring. Then she grew restless, walked up and down the room, called her maid, gave some orders, contradicted them, scolded the nurse, and wandered aimlessly about the house.

When Monina was fairly asleep Pepa locked herself

into her own room: beyond a doubt some mystery was in the air, filling it with an electric tension that could be felt though not seen. But every human soul tormented by a crushing grief is disposed to imagine that the unknown woes of others must be of a similar character, and Pepa believed that her father's uneasiness must be in some way akin to her own sorrows, or at any rate that their griefs had a common origin. The magnitude of her own misery blinded her to every other; she could not think that any living soul could be troubled by another cause than this dreaded truce between Leon and María, which had been so abruptly announced.

No arguments to prove that the source of our anguish may be a lie have any effect in extracting the sting; on the contrary, a syllogism is the worst forceps in the world and when it is applied to extract only a thorn it seems to increase the smart a hundred-fold. Pepa, when she tried to convince herself that Pilar's information was a fiction, only tortured herself the more. This reconciliation racked her as though a harrow were being dragged over her bleeding heart.

It was growing late, and Don Pedro, she knew, would not come till morning. His benevolence and liberality maintained more than one house in Madrid besides his own.

An idea had entered Pepa's head, and she did not hesitate to carry it out. She drove to Suertebella, crept into the house through the museum and the *Incroyable* drawing-room, whence she made her way

through the long suites of apartments to the room she wanted to reach. As we have seen she realised her project; with regard to its issue we can only beg the reader to have patience and read on.

CHAPTER XVI.

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AN EXCESS OF ZEAL.

VERY early on the Wednesday morning Leon went out to take a walk in the garden. When he went in again, he sat down alone in the "Hall of Hymen," where he was presently joined by Gustavo. Telleria had put on a face of stern severity and held his head high with an assumption of forensic dignity, and a certain ostentation and inflation of demeanour due apparently to the glow kept up inside him by the combustion of "laws human and divine;" so that he seemed ready to burst, but for the relief afforded by the crater of his mouth through which all this inflammatory ferment found an issue, mingled with the lava of his indignation. Leon saw at once that mischief was brewing.

"I have been anxiously awaiting daylight to have an opportunity of talking to you," said Gustavo in dry tones that argued considerable annoyance.

"If you were so impatient," replied Leon even more drily, "you might have struck a light and we could have talked at night."

"At night? No. I feared I might disturb you in more agreeable society," said the lawyer sarcastically.

"Then speak at once, and as briefly as you can. Forget, for once, that you are an orator, and that you spend your life among women who are never tired of talking."

"I am sorry to disappoint you, but I must tell you that I cannot be brief."

"So much the worse," said Leon with sullen bitterness. "Since you must preach, begin by preaching patience."

"You have plenty for your own evil deeds," replied Gustavo hotly. "What I ought to preach to you now, is submission, if you were capable of it."

"Submission? Am I not listening to you?" said Roch, who had reached a state of mind in which he found it impossible to conceal his antipathy for the whole family.

"Still you will need it — for your sceptical coolness, which is simply the corruption of your dead soul, will not stand you in stead when you hear what I have to say to you. You know that I am opposed to duelling as being contrary to all laws human and divine."

"I defend the practice no more than you do; but I could think even duelling a good thing if the laws human and divine of which you speak are yours."

"They are mine, and they are the only true ones. I hate duelling as being absurd and sinful; still. . . ."

"Still, under existing circumstances," said the other

interrupting him, "you are willing to risk damnation for the pleasure of killing me."

"It will be no pleasure, *I* am a Christian."

"Speak out," said Leon growing angry. "What are you driving at? Have you come to challenge me? A duel is an absurdity which is very generally accepted; a murder depending on luck and skill which occasionally is irresistibly forced on us. I accept this challenge to murder — whenever you please; to-day, to-morrow, with the weapons you may select."

"No, you have quite misunderstood me," said Gustavo turning the question like a lawyer who only wishes to prolong a case. "I was saying that even though I am no advocate of duelling this would be an occasion when I might set aside my religious scruples and take up a pistol or a sword. . . ."

"Then do so."

"No. — You have done evil enough to justify such a man as I am in trampling on every moral prejudice, on all laws human and divine, and trusting to a weapon to execute justice. But. . . ."

"But. . . ." said Leon mimicking his brother-in-law's tone. "Speak, my dear fellow; speak and think frankly, as I do when I say: 'I hate you.'"

"Nay. My principles do not allow me to say, 'I hate you;' but, 'I pity you.' Not, 'I will kill you; but 'God will kill you!'"

"Then do not speak in accordance with your principles; adopt some others for the nonce — try mine."

"If I did I should place myself in antagonism to

all law, human and divine. But to conclude: a duel is out of the question, because in this case every advantage would be on my side. In the first place: I am right and you are wrong; you are the criminal and I the judge; and by all the laws of logic I am the conqueror and you are the vanquished. In the second place: I am skilled in the use of every kind of weapon, having for the sake of my health kept myself in constant practice by shooting at a mark and fencing; while you, who have given your whole time to the study of physics and geology, cannot handle either a pistol or a sword. So that even on the ground of brute force I must be the conqueror. In spite of all this, much as it may surprise you. . . ."

"You forgive me!" exclaimed Leon controlling his rage to indulge his sarcasm. "Thanks — a thousand thanks — with your elephant-load of 'laws human and divine.'"

"I do not forgive you," said the other putting all the dramatic emphasis he could command into his fine deep voice. "In renouncing the advantages I have over you I simply renounce the task of punishing you with my own hand, and deliver you over to the arm of God, which is already raised to strike you."

"Again many thanks," repeated Leon, but his irony was not unmixed with anger. "You are no doubt God's high sheriff. It is, I presume to your familiarity with God, whose apostle you are, that you owe your knowledge of his high purposes and your certainty of divine justice."

"The purposes of Providence are seen in events, of which the ordering is sometimes so clear that none but an idiot can fail to see in them the threatening gesture of that awful arm. I do not fancy myself an inspired prophet. To foretell your punishment I only needed to know a fact of which you are ignorant. That is why I refuse to fight, that is why I leave your chastisement in the Hands of One who will inflict it more surely than I can. And that is why I say: 'You will die!"

"Die!" exclaimed Leon, who, though he scorned his adversary, could not hear these words without a shock.

"Yes, you. You will die of rage!"

"That I think likely enough," said Leon, thinking over the odious list of his wife's family. "One may die too of a surfeit of relations; and when a man whose only object in life is domestic happiness, with its pure and honourable joys, finds nothing but a chamber of torture where he is martyred on the rack, it is probable that he will writhe and grow weary of it. There are poisonous herbs, and there are venomous families."

"You will die of sheer rage," Gustavo went on with brutal insistence. "I know it, I have seen it — I have it in my own keeping — in a sealed packet in my desk, of which every letter is a drop of the mortal poison which will be the death of you."

"I do not understand," said Leon, his curiosity roused at last. "What is it? A lawsuit? Do you

think you can kill me with a lawsuit? You wretched law-mongers spend your lives in poisoning the human race, and you think that I shall swallow the bait of your sophistry. — I do not want to know what horrible intrigue you have been plotting against me."

"I am plotting no intrigue — there is no intrigue in the matter. — There is nothing but justice; and even of that justice I am not the originator but the instrument. Under other circumstances I should have done nothing to abet it, but since your behaviour to my poor sister, aggravated too by the disgraceful facts that have lately come to my knowledge. . ."

"When?" asked Leon and his voice was like distant thunder.

"You do not know?"

"No. What are these disgraceful facts?"

"And the hypocrite can ask! — Here."

"Here! — what?"

"You try to ignore it, but your pale face betrays your guilt, and under the pangs of awakened conscience even the hardened mask of the sceptic must blush. Quite lately I have seen you in all the naked hideousness of your nature, and the depravity of your moral sense. It is monstrous!"

"Explain yourself — or. . ." and Leon's hands were clenched as though he longed to choke some one.

"By all means. Is your connection with the mistress of this house any secret, as well as your treacherous betrayal of the most saintly, pure, and angelic woman

that God ever sent into this world? However, your conduct up to this time, though a breach of every law, human or divine, has not been grossly scandalous. Though morally criminal, you have not yet fallen in the scale of wickedness to the level where it is hard to distinguish a man from a devil."

"Pray describe to me that depth of vileness in which I might be taken for one of your friends," said Leon, again lending his fury the guise of an acrid humour which, like absinthe, embitters and intoxicates a man while it makes him laugh.

"Why do you ask me to tell you things you full well know? But, to be sure, there are reprobate natures which like to have the mirror held up to them, and revel in the hideousness of their own image, like apes who gaze at their reflection in a puddle."

"No more of this coarse rigimarole and sham rhetoric! Speak plainly, state facts, call things by their names; we want no special pleading and parliamentary rhodomontade; I am sick of this endless parade of words, and confusion of divine laws with human subterfuge."

"Oh, very well,—then I will speak plainly. After reducing my unfortunate sister to the state in which she now lies, any man, however wicked, might respect her weakness, if not her innocence. In every dying human creature there is something of the angel. You have not respected even that; while your saintly victim is lying on her death-bed, soothed perhaps by your lies, and believing you less base than you really are, you can meet your

paramour in the *Incroyable* room. Cheating one, and making love to the other; killing one by inches, and giving the other the affection due to your wife! Well, I can understand this, Leon. I can understand falsehood and guilty passion. — What I cannot understand, because it seems to me baseness too utter for humanity, is that both crimes should be committed under the same roof. Two such deeds of infamy are too much at the same time and place."

Leon, before his accuser had ended his diatribe, had broken out into a frank fit of scornful laughter which seemed to have dissipated his indignation.

"Laugh — laugh away — I am not surprised at that. I am well aware of the audacious cynicism which lies hidden behind that mask of philosophical virtue. Your whole moral nature is a like an artificial plant, which it is easy to strip of the flowers and leaves which have given it a semblance of life. That is what your moral theories are: artificial flowers; for natural flowers which have perfume and colour cannot bloom in an empty vessel, or grow from a soil of mathematical formulas and barren science. And to think that I could defend you against the accusations of my family! that I could ever have believed in your honour! Good Heavens! how could I be so deceived."

"But are you perfectly certain that I did meet Pepa while my wife was asleep?" asked Leon in a sarcastic tone which conveyed his sovereign contempt. "Did you see it? There are eyes that see falsehoods."

"I saw it. I was sitting with my mother, who,

whatever her faults may be as a woman, is a tender and loving parent, and who could not tear herself away from this house where her only daughter is suffering. Not being able to see her, in consequence of your cruel and selfish prohibition, she resigned herself to weep and watch from a distance the door of María's room. I sat with her all night, to share her grief, while my father — whose weakness in the most critical circumstances is really inexcusable — took a lamp and went to inspect a collection of curiosities to which only men are admitted by special permission from Fúcar. Polito had drunk too much, with his friend Perico Nules, and was rather noisy. He began by wandering about the passages and annoying the maid servants, till I went after him, and succeeded in locking him up, — by midnight he was sleeping like a drunken angel. My mother and I were making up accounts in the Chinese boudoir and trying to arrange our disordered affairs; afterwards she said her prayers, and I, after searching the house in vain for a book to read, also gave myself up to my devotions. Within these magnificent walls, where so many marvels are collected, where copies from the antique alternate with monstrosities of gaudy taste, representative of modern art, there is everything that man can ask for, excepting a library. Since, on entering this house one must leave one's intelligence on the doorstep, it is as well perhaps that one's senses should be kept alive to make it easier! — My mother was tired of praying but was not sleepy; she was thinking of our dear María and of some way of cheating you and seeing

her daughter. She would not go to bed and treading on tiptoe, she took to wandering through the rooms. As she approached the *Incroyable* room she thought she heard voices. She called me, and I hastened to join her; we went forward together and listened. The first sounds we heard were sobs, as we thought, but we at once understood that they were in fact passionate kisses. It was you — and she. — We hid behind the group of Meleager and Atalanta in the corridor and heard her open the door into the museum; we afterwards heard you pass through the room, returning to hide your disgraced head, crowned, as I may say, with laurels of infamy, on the pillow of your martyred wife. The woman who was with you was Pepa; and to remove every doubt my father can confirm it, for he met her as he was returning with the lamp in his hand from the cabinet of curiosities he had been inspecting."

"And is that all?" said Leon calmly. "Has your espionage discovered no more than that? There are creatures who cannot breathe without exhaling slander!"

"Slander! What next? Of course I know that you can give the facts an interpretation favourable to yourself. You are never at a loss for sophistries to defend yourself."

"I, defend myself! I, condescend to touch the dirt-heap of your foul suspicions, to argue about a fact that you and your mother have seen through the jaundiced spectrum of your impure imaginations! — Never!"

"The device is an ingenious one, but it fails of its effect. I am not convinced."

"I do not want to convince either you or her," said Leon with vehement fury. "Your opinion is to me so absolutely worthless that I positively feel a certain satisfaction in leaving you in your mistake. Your infernal nimbus of evil thoughts becomes you so amazingly. Do you think that I flatter myself that I can change the baseness of your souls, or by any waste of words create an idea of purity and honour in a mind tainted with the leprosy of chronic sin. Your opinions, and the opinions of all your execrable family, who repay solid benefits with slander, are to me no more than the rain which wets us but cannot blacken us. Do we quarrel with the coach-wheel which splashes us with mud? And you — the political and religious moralist, always preaching party-sermons; you — a machine for grinding out ready-made morality; you — who pound up 'laws human and divine' into a patent lozenge, to cram the world with an anodyne of sophistry and piety flavoured to each man's taste — you cannot dose me with morality packed into a sugar-plum! My faults may perhaps serve your turn as virtues, and the base sentiments that I disown and cast out, you may, if you please, pick out of the dirt and make the pride and boast of your conscience. Before preaching to me why do you not look at home? If you study yourself you must surely see that your life, your fame, and your credit would vanish like smoke if San Salomó were a man instead of a puppet."

Gustavo's lips were bloodless, his hands trembled and his eyes flashed as Leon spoke; and then, not knowing what to say, he hesitated a few minutes before he spoke.

"You are a skilful antagonist," he said, "and have turned the point against my own breast. Well—I do not deny it; you may learn from me at any rate the virtue of candour, the merits of confession, of which an atheist is incapable. I plead guilty; the giddy whirl of the world, the weakness of Man's nature, the blandishments of flattery and applause have led me, I own, into antagonism to those laws, human and divine, which I acknowledge and respect. I am the first to accuse myself, as I was the first to cast a stone at the scandals of my family, and the first to defend you so long as I believed in your integrity—you know that. But there is no sort of comparison between your crime and mine, between your treachery and mine. We have both sinned; you, out of sheer cynicism and absolute ignoring of right, I out of weakness of will. In you there is nothing but evil, there is no door by which good can enter into your darkened soul; in me, though my deeds have been evil, faith is still left—a way by which good may come in. Your sin stands alone in its hideous blackness; mine has brought with it the precious grace of repentance. You are not capable of any amendment; I am. You see nothing beyond; I see salvation, because I see amendment. To me, the very idea of sin suggests that of pardon. I do not know my own destiny, but I do know that of

the human race, and the fact that Heaven exists is enough for me. You know nothing, and evil has no terrors for you because you do not believe in the existence of Hell."

"This is sophistry, and mere juggling with words. What can you know of what I think or am? Do you believe that men and souls are at the mercy of your apostolic dogmatism, of your insolent and official interpretation of the gospel by which you issue death-warrants or reprieves? You fancy yourself a sort of inspector of passports to Heaven! But do you suppose that there really is an office where our luggage is examined to see if we are smuggling tobacco — that is to say anything prohibited in your manufactories of lies where ideas are stamped and then sold, all cut and dried, to hypocrites? — Do me the favour and honour of relieving me of your presence or I cannot answer for observing the respect due to this house and to the tie which unites us."

"You are the murderer of an angel!" bellowed Gustavo, mad with fury.

"I shall really lose patience with your follies," said Leon, taking three steps forward with so threatening a gesture that Gustavo involuntarily retreated, but he was no coward and at once made a stand. "Be silent or you will find out that my endurance has an end and see what a man can do when he can bear no more." And pointing to the window Leon extended an arm which, though by no means Herculean, was capable of exerting no small strength.

"And if you continue to provoke me, although I am no advocate of duelling, and have no practice with pistols or swords, and no skill in preaching sermons, I will promise you a pleasant half-hour. I will show you how an apostle flies out of window and no earthly power can prevent it."

"Indulge if you choose in such an abuse of brute strength!" retorted Gustavo with a glare of defiance. "You have murdered my sister as it is."

"You cannot aggravate my rage by saying that," cried Leon beside himself. "Your sister and yourself, your father and your mother, are to me no more than the birds that fly past. You have ceased to exist for me. — Now choose — the door or the window."

The dispute might have terminated in a fray and perhaps some act of violence, but the marquesa came rushing in with loud cries, and behind her Don Agustin in evident dismay and alarm.

"What is all this? Leon — Gustavo — my dear children!" cried the lady, interposing with outstretched arms.

"This man," roared Gustavo.

"Leon — what will you do next? After shutting up our darling so cruelly. . ."

"I — shut her up! I?" said Leon talking rather wildly. "No, there she is; I leave her to you, I make you a present of her."

"You would not allow us to go in to see her. Thinking of that sweet martyr, I have not slept a wink all night," said the marquis.

"Go in, all of you," said Leon, pointing to the door leading to his wife's room. "Go in."

And without waiting for another word, the Tellerias rushed in. A vehement sound of kissing ensued, given with a warmth and eagerness that were only natural after this enforced separation.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TRUTH.

AFTER the first greetings were over María asked:

"Tell me, Mamma, did I dream it, or is it true that I heard Gustavo's voice and my husband's as if they were quarrelling?"

"We had a little discussion," said the young man, who had not yet recovered from his pallor and nervousness, nor got rid of the lines in his forehead — that sacred tablet on which fancy might read the decalogue and the latest code.

"No, no, mere words and rubbish," interrupted Milagros, whose one idea was the reconciliation, a thought intimately allied with the wish.

"Your respected husband, made madly savage by my accusations, proposed to settle my share in the business by flinging me over the balcony like a cigar-end," said Gustavo, and he tried to laugh at his own wit in

the belief that the effort would restore his nerves to their normal balance.

"Where was this?"

"In the 'hall of Hymen.'"

"What is that?"

"Don't worry yourself about it, my darling child."

"My dearest daughter," said her father, caressing her, "you must learn to accustom yourself to view your husband's proceedings with indifference, and to feel that what he does, or leaves undone cannot matter to you. It is greatly to be regretted that you cannot get over certain deeply-rooted feelings, and that you are bent on being a martyr and struggling against wind and tide."

"What are you talking about, Papa?" asked María bewildered.

"I," continued Don Agustin, laying his hand on his burly person to attest his honour, "I am determined to bring all the energy of my character to bear on the one object of avoiding a scandal which must bring discredit on us all, and place you in the most ridiculous position."

"Agustin," said Milagros, unable to conceal her vexation, "you had better go and study the museum. You are not wanted here." And she gave emphasis to the hint by nudging her husband's elbow to convey to him that the time had not come for any display of energy or avoidance of scandal. As a woman and a mother she had understood the illusion in which Leon had chosen to leave his wife, and approving it, endeavoured to keep it up.

"What museum?" asked María more and more

puzzled, and seizing at once on any clue that might strengthen her awakened suspicions.

"A museum not far off," stammered the marquis taking his wife's hint and acting upon it to the best of his intelligence, for with all his faults he was devoted to his daughter. "One that has lately been opened at Suertebella. . ."

María looked from one to another in blank astonishment, questioning them with dull bewilderment in her eyes, while her lips could hardly frame the enquiries that formed themselves in her brain.

"Suertebella — near this?" she murmured. "Tell me one thing."

"What?"

"What is it, my child?"

"How is it that I seem to feel the stone and mortar of that house here — in my very being; I feel its walls. . ."

"What are you talking about my love?"

"Its walls are crushing me."

"Good Heavens! do not talk so wildly!"

"What delirious fancies are these! It is much to be regretted that your sound judgment. . ."

"This house. . ."

"Is a house . . . you know, a building. . ."

At this instant Polito flew into the room with outspread arms and flung them round his sister exclaiming: "Mariquilla, so at last your blessed husband will allow us to see you! He is a gaoler, a bandit, a wretch! I was in the court-yard looking on at a fight between two

dogs and fourteen rats when they told me I might see you. I rushed up. — And your husband is out there too, looking like a statue, and more stony than the group of Hymen. Dear little woman, you are quite well now, are you not? — you will get up and get away from this place?"

Milagros almost skinned her elbow driving it against her son's ribs, but without putting a check on this torrent of indiscretion.

"There is a strange and horrible look of fear on all your faces," said María, gazing at them all in turn. "You look as if you longed to tell me, but at the same time wanted to hide some dreadful fact."

"My darling child, you are still far from strong," said the marquis stroking her hair. "When you are quite well again and can come home with us. . . ."

"The poor child fancies things that have no existence," said Milagros anxiously. "It would be far better if you would all go and leave us to ourselves."

"You are deceiving me, you are in league to deceive me!" cried María with sudden frenzy. And raising the Crucifix that lay upon her pillow, she said:

"Dare to tell a falsehood in the face of this."

They all were silent except Gustavo, and he, extending an oratorical and legislative hand towards the sacred image, said, with grandiloquent emphasis:

"I abhor falsehood, and I believe that it can never under any circumstances be wrong or injurious to speak the truth."

Milagros seized him as if to thrust him out of the

room; but he went closer to his sister and, patting her cheeks, bent over her to say:

"But you are worrying yourself about trifles. Your saintliness and virtue have given you a position so exalted that you can afford to look down with contempt on a man who deserves nothing else from you. You are better already, and before long we will take you home, to our house, where you will be better cared for than ever, where we shall appreciate your worth and adore you as you deserve to be adored. . . . Rejoice instead of sorrowing, and give thanks for your recovered freedom. Poor martyr!"

Gustavo did not mean to be perverse, but he was possessed with a perfectly fanatical form of what is called public virtue.

"Poor martyr." María repeated sadly, fixing her eyes on vacancy, on a remote spot where there was absolutely nothing to be seen, nothing but the vague projection of her own thought. After a short silence she said in a voice that became weaker as she spoke:

"I dreamed it. I dreamed the truth, and falsehood cheated me when I awoke."

Then, suddenly sitting up in bed, she cried out: "Where is my husband?"

"He will come this moment, my sweet," said her mother kissing her fondly. "Compose yourself, or you will make yourself ill again."

"Who was it but you that filled my mind with jealousy?" the martyr went on, turning indignantly on her mother. "Why should you try to soothe me now?

Fetch my husband and Padre Paoletti. — Every one else must go; leave me with them."

She put her hand to her forehead with a sharp cry.

"What is it? Merciful Heaven!"

"A pain in my head," she murmured closing her eyes. "A pain that pierces and burns my brain. — That woman! Mamma, do you see her? That woman has driven a red hot nail into my head."

They all stood dumb with horror.

"Help me, help me!" cried María fairly raving. "Do you not see her coming towards me? Will no one have the charity to drive her away, to throttle her? Jesus, Saviour of my soul — protect me!"

There was a solemn and terrified silence, broken only by the marquis, who indulged in a smothered fit of coughing. Milagros was crying, kissing her daughter, and appealing to her with tender words. But María did not answer; her eyes were shut and her speechless stupor was like the silence of death.

They were rushing for the doctor when he came in. He immediately pronounced the patient to be in a very critical state; he was excessively angry, saying that he would take no responsibility, as his orders had not been obeyed, and ordered every one out of the room with exasperated indignation.

Heroic remedies could alone avail. The battle which had seemed to be won, would yet be lost but by the grace of God. His utmost powers must be put forth to make up for this sudden desertion on the part

of Nature; she had gone over to the enemy's camp, leaving science single-handed and almost desperate.

After his dispute with his brother-in-law, Leon had remained quiet for a little while; then he was seized with that craving for violent exercise which comes over us in certain states of mind, as though a skein of suffering were wound round us and we must walk far to release ourself.

For above an hour he paced about the grounds. When he came in again, as he was passing through the "Hall of Hymen," he perceived, on a chair, a broad brimmed black hat. Seated on the divan which surrounded the pedestal of the marble group, he discovered the diminutive person of Padre Paoletti, looking smaller than ever in his hunched-up attitude. Out of the little black mass came his pleasant face and those eyes which sparkled so vividly, as he slowly uncurled himself like a snail creeping out of its shell. It was a strange fact, but in his present state of mind the presence of the priest seemed to comfort Leon.

"They told me as I came in," said Paoletti in evident distress, "that Doña María was suddenly very much worse. You see how useless our deceit has been. Is the time come for the truth?"

"Perhaps," said Leon holding the door for Paoletti to go into the room first.

They arrived just as Moreno was applying the last

resources of his skill. Paoletti at once retired to pray in the chapel, which was ablaze with tapers; the husband and the physician remained to watch with infinite anguish and pity the drama of a diseased brain where ideas — or intangible fluids — and organic life — or a mysterious essence — were going the circuit of the nervous centres in a bewildering round, their obscure struggle hastening on the divorce which we call death. Everything was done that lay in human power to avert immediate danger and divert the mischief from the centre to the extremities. But no remedy availed to rouse the reaction that might have expelled the enemy. It progressed triumphantly, like a desperate invader who has burnt his ships. They tried everything and each trial only confirmed them in despair.

All day the sufferer lay in a state of alternate delirium and prostration. The physician announced with solemn decision that the end could not be far off.

"What remains to be done," he said, "is in the hands of the physician of the soul."

Later in the day María seemed to wake up and her mind was clear; she was quite herself again, and enjoying that brief interval of lucidity which nature almost always grants in such cases, as though to allow those who are about to pass into the other world to cast a parting glance on this which they are quitting.

"Pray leave me alone with my spiritual director," said María in feeble accents, and the husband and doctor at once left the room. There was no further need for science or earthly love.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BATTLE.

MARIA fixed her eyes on Paoletti's face with a softened gaze. The circumstances were so solemn that even the good little priest, accustomed as he was to melancholy and emotional scenes, was deeply moved. Controlling himself however, he went up to the bed, and taking the fevered white hand that she held out to him, said with mystical enthusiasm:

"We are alone, my beloved daughter — my sister and friend, whom I love most truly; alone with our spiritual thoughts and sacred fervour. Fear has no place here; joy reigns alone. Arise, pure conscience, fear not; appear in all your brightness, rejoice in your own beauty, and instead of dreading the hour of release look forward to it eagerly. Oh Triumph! do not disguise thyself under a false semblance of defeat."

María, less eager than usual to swallow the sweet droppings of this mystical honeycomb, was thinking, in fact, of something else. It was with bitterness as well as sadness that she said:

"I have been deceived."

"With a pious purpose," replied Paoletti promptly. "The alarming state of your health required the concealment of the painful truth. Forgive me if I too lent

myself to the deception which was, as I repeat, a deed of christian charity. I saw how necessary it was to second your husband's beneficent plan. . ."

"And he has kept me, and is keeping me, under that woman's roof," she exclaimed, half-choking.

"It was through no fault of his. There was no other house within reach where you could have the requisite medical attendance and be properly taken care of. I entirely approve of your having been brought here. A life in imminent peril is not a thing to be lifted and carried about like a sack. The best thing that could happen to you was to be here."

"And I dreamed it — and when I woke they denied it." She was too weak to speak more than a few words at a time, and it is impossible to give any idea of the feeble, extinct, quavering tones of her voice. It was like that of a forsaken child, wearied out with calling and crying for its mother.

"And my husband and that woman," she went on, "will meet hour after hour in this house to embrace and to count. . ." again her voice failed her, and Paoletti himself felt a lump rising in his throat.

"To count the minutes I have left to live — as I count the beads of my rosary."

There was a pause, during which the confessor tried to regain his composure.

"My dearest friend in the Lord," he began, "this is really a monstrous invention of your fancy. Listen to me while I tell you the exact facts, the truth to which I bear witness as a servant of God. The truth can do

no harm to a noble soul like yours; a conscience so brave and so blameless will not be unhinged by a revelation of human weakness which cannot in any way affect it, any more than the dust blown up from the highway can affect the purity and whiteness of the clouds in the sky. You shall hear the whole truth, with nothing kept back and nothing added. Don Leon, it is true, loves this lady; he himself owned as much to me; and as he did not tell me under the seal of confession, I may and ought to tell you. But at the same time, I solemnly declare to you that the lady is not now at Suertebella, but that your husband himself begged and desired her to leave. Decency I may say required it, which is the outward sign of the grace of modesty. Your unhappy husband is, of course, incapable of any moral feeling; but, thanks to a cultivated mind, he has the religion of appearances, and can always assume that superficial guise of virtue which we term chivalry."

María made no reply. Her white hand, which had not, during her brief illness, had time to grow thin and retained its delicate roundness, was playing with the fringe of the counterpane. Not far from this restless hand was the small bullet-head of the Italian; his face pale and lifeless when he sat with his eyes cast down, though, when he looked up, they glittered with a flash that suggested the sparkling of fireworks.

"I cannot believe," said the priest fixing María with the fascination of that glance, "that a spirit so fortified by divine love as yours is, can allow these facts to dis-

turb it. I know you well, and I cannot imagine that beautiful soul fettered and dragged down by trivial anxieties like any ordinary woman, or detaching its thoughts from the sublime ideal spheres to wander through the murky paths of worldly disputations, like idle minds that find time too long. Am I right my beloved daughter? Am I mistaken in thinking that those eyes, accustomed to the splendours of Heaven, can no longer deign to look down on the feebler lights of earth?"

"I am jealous," said María in the tone in which we state a pathetic truth. And just as the centurion gave the Redeemer a sponge dipped in vinegar for refreshment when he was athirst, the priest poured honey and vinegar into María's parched soul.

"Jealous!" he said. "Jealous, when you have fired your heart with the love that is never unrequited! Unless I have failed to enter into the feelings of my illustrious penitent, she must have fortitude, and grace, and a sense of divine love which will raise her above such base anxieties. Jealous — of whom? Of another woman, and for the sake of a man; jealous, of nothing in a creature who is nothing and who is worth nothing! — Some radical change must have taken place in your mind, my dear daughter. What has occasioned it?"

"Jealousy," murmured María from the depths of her anguish.

Then, by slow degrees, frequently pausing to rest, María related all that had happened since Pilar de San Salomó had told her of Leon's infidelities, until she lost

consciousness. She told the priest everything, omitting nothing of importance, nor any interesting detail.

"Excepting your outbursts of indignation, your sacrifice to worldly prejudice in the matter of dress, and your overhasty action, there is nothing reprehensible in your conduct," said Paoletti as he sat with his head resting on his hand and his eyes cast down on the floor — like a weapon laid by in its sheath, listening to her story, word by word, drop by drop like an extract distilled from an alembic. María breathed a sigh of relief.

"I thought I had sinned heavily," she said.

"You have sinned no doubt, in the way I have said; but it is no mortal sin. I see in your visit nothing more than a woman's natural impulse to prevent the rupture of a sacred tie. I have told you already, many times, that your pure desire to cultivate the spiritual life, and his deep contempt for the faith cannot exempt either of you from the duties of married life. So long as you both live, you are bound together by the sacrament of marriage, and when one strove to burst the bonds it was only natural and right that the other should fly to prevent it; nay to tighten the tie if that were possible. Ah! my most precious daughter, how often have we talked it over!"

María nodded affirmatively and fixed her eyes on the ceiling.

"When my object was to give a fixed purpose to your beautiful life, I have often said this," continued Paoletti, not lifting his gaze from the ground, but star-

ing at the carpet, as if he did not know where to look. "Many times as you know, I have quieted your mind on this point when you were disturbed by scruples. 'No,' I have said, 'God cannot require a married woman to close her mind to every consideration of what she owes to her husband.' He, even though he may have erred in spiritual things, has a right which cannot be abrogated even though his ideas and principles may be in direct opposition to those of his wife. Although, seeing his contumacious incredulity it is impossible that you should give him an atom — I say an atom since I must perforce use a material image — an atom, I say, of your exquisite spirit, of those graces which are claimed by their Creator; although you cannot have any single idea in common, nor that confidence which might fill him with vain hopes that he could ever turn his wife out of the path of perfection in which she is walking — still, all that is not of the spirit is his; all that is essentially of the flesh and world. You have confided to me all your most intimate thoughts, all the tender secrets of your soul — all your husband's expressions and opinions; I have fully appreciated him and on my knowledge of the facts I laid down for you a scheme of life to which you have perfectly conformed until now, when I find you distraught and wandering from the path. But remember all we have said about it, and my arguments which will set everything in its right light; and never confuse spiritual things with what is merely human, or that which is of God with the things of the flesh."

María said nothing, but turned herself wearily on her pillow.

"Speak to me, my dear and precious lamb."

"My husband said a great deal. . . ." she murmured.

"Yes; and you know that in our delightful discussions I was always able to confute his sophistical arguments; you always saw I was right — you were always convinced."

"But then I was not jealous — and jealousy — I know it now as surely as I know God — jealousy is my way of loving."

"Yes, you loved him!" said Paoletti a good deal confused, as he glanced up for a moment and then looked down again, "because you took an interest in him, and did not wish him to suffer; and in this I supported you — always supported you."

"But still, he said a great deal," repeated María in the same weary tone of an unhappy child. "He said that you. . ."

"Well, that I?"

"That you, by constantly pruning my affections to concentrate them on God, by pruning my ideas, from a terror of atheism, by robbing him of my heart and leaving nothing but duty, had left him nothing of his wife but the slave of his desires."

"Oh! woman, woman!" exclaimed Paoletti eagerly and not without some dignity. "How often have I refuted this argument, which is terrible only in appearance, and left you soothed and reassured!"

"But can you refute the fact. . ."

"What fact?"

"That I am jealous, envious; that now I long for what is no longer mine."

The worthy priest looked up and raised his head: nay, not content with this, but wishing, it would seem, to let the light of his eyes shine forth like a beacon to guide the wandering seaman, he rose to his feet and stood looking down on his penitent. He was in fact uncomfortable, ill at ease, and, if the truth must be told, not entirely pleased with himself.

"My dear lady," he went on, piercing her with his glance as an angel might pierce with his sword, "I shall be compelled to speak to you with a severity which ill accords with the friendship — Friendship, do I say? — respect, veneration, which I feel for you; for indeed your many and great perfections have made me cease to regard you as a penitent or even as a friend in the Lord; I have learnt to think of you as a saint, as a pure and exquisite creature, far above myself in every respect. And now . . . !"

There was a pause. María, moved by this appeal, folded her white hands and exclaimed fervently:

"O Lord! and my precious brother! come both of you and help me!"

"Call upon them with a heart purified from all baser affections, which are, as I may say, the rust of the soul," said Paoletti, feeling the fount of his eloquence unsealed. "If you call upon them so, they will respond. A fervent spiritual impulsion, my sweet friend," and he pressed his hand to his heart as though he were clutch-

ing it. "A deep yearning from the soul, an afflatus arising from two aspirations: the desire to cast off this foul body and the craving to fly up and away to the radiant and serene realm above, never to return. Courage, beautiful soul — on whose wings we may already see the pearly reflections of the glorious day of Paradise — courage! and let not your wings droop. You are near the goal. Gaze upwards," and he suited the action to the word, "do not look down; that will make you giddy — look up, and you will see the loveliness and splendour that lies before you, infinitely beyond anything that your fancy can dream of in its most rapturous flights. There you will hear celestial strains, and feel that exquisite and joyful ease which will wrap you in ecstasy, in a robe of ravishment, and in heavenly contemplation. Do not look back, seraphic soul, I entreat you; for your own sake and for ours who look on you as an example, for the Glory of God who made you so perfect as His crowning work, for His own pleasure and glory; on my knees I beseech you — I a humble priest of no worth, of no account, but that it has been my privilege to lead you in the path to eternal joys, oh beatific soul! Thus winning some small merit which is as nothing by the side of yours."

There was a silence. Paoletti was a man of entire good faith and meant all he said; he knelt down and clasped his hands.

"You — on your knees," murmured María. "No no — not that. I will do as you desire me. But how am I to escape from the feelings that possess me?"

"Feel something different," said the Italian rising. "You must know it well; you who have schooled your heart and mind with the care and watchfulness of a saint. Do you experience any diminution in the fervour or depth of your love to God, in your pious zeal?"

María waved her hand in negation. Then, turning her head towards Paoletti that he might hear her better, she said:

"And if I do not cast out — what you bid me cast out, will it delay my salvation?"

"Nay, angel of goodness! Never for an instant have I doubted of your salvation. What, can a soul so full of merits be lost? Never. — There is no need for you to tell me that these feelings which have come to agitate you are untainted by rancour, and will not prevent your full forgiveness of those by whom offences have come. Am I wrong?"

María shook her head.

"Then your salvation is sure. If I try to eradicate this insignificant weed it is only because I long to see so lovely a soul absolutely spotless — because I cannot be satisfied with a victory, but crave a triumph and long to see you wear the crown, not merely of virtue but of sanctity. What I desire," he added enthusiastically, "is that you should rise to Heaven bathed in light and glory, hailed by rejoicing angels and that you should not look back from the everlasting threshold of star-sown sapphire, even to cast a glance of contempt at this world. What I desire to see in you, is absolute purity, the celestial essence of love!"

"All this I can have without being able to free myself from earthly griefs. If I can be saved as I am, God may take me as I am."

Paoletti was silent; suddenly he said:

"My dear daughter, do you, with all your heart, forgive those who have sinned against you?"

A pause.

"Yes," said María, when the priest had given up all hope of a reply. "I forgive my husband whose infidelity has killed me." And as she spoke the tears flowed down her cheeks.

"And her, too — the woman who has robbed you of your husband's affection. — Do you forgive her?"

Paoletti stood waiting with his eyes fixed on the dying woman's face. María closed hers in deep abstraction. The priest thought it was the end; he bent over her in great alarm. But presently he heard a sob which said: "Yes — her, too."

"Then my beloved and noble daughter, if you forgive — which is the only way to expel the evil leaven from your soul, you will enter the gates of Heaven in triumph," said the Padre in a voice of dramatic solemnity.

There could be no doubt that he held the key of those gates. Suddenly, inspired as it seemed by the supernatural influence the priest exercised over her, María rallied her strength and particularly her powers of voice. Even her pale cheeks recovered a tinge of colour which gave fresh brilliancy and eagerness to her eyes.

"Your words have given me new life!" she said, without difficulty. "I had a cloud, a veil before my eyes, and it has vanished; I see clearly — so clearly that I can only marvel at the mercies the Lord has vouchsafed to me in shedding this light on my soul, and know not how to thank Him. He has shown me the path by which I may go to Him, and called me with the voice of His loving kindness. I will follow — I come, I come, my God, Father and Redeemer, I clasp thy cross!"

"This, this is what I longed for, my beloved penitent and friend," exclaimed the enraptured priest, while tears started to his eyes and ran down his cheeks. "Soon your spirit will dwell in the realms of eternal bliss. How blessed is it, my daughter, to have no fear of death, but, on the contrary, to look forward with joy to the moment when the last spark of this miserable existence is lost in the first radiance of a life of endless glory! Sweetest soul, purified by prayer, by unfailing piety, by heroic mortification of the evil within, by incessant absorption into the divine idea — spread your wings, whiter than sunlit clouds — fear not, soar upwards, fix your eyes on the goal, open your ears to the hymn that greets you, inhale the ineffable fragrance of Paradise, be bold to enter the fatherly presence of the Creator of the sun and stars — who will welcome you with the smile which gave birth to light itself, and receive you as a martyr and a saint."

"Yes —" said María folding her hands calmly across her bosom. "I feel myself float upwards, and I

can find no words to express my happiness. I feel as if I had already forgotten the language of this world and could not speak it. My last words still shall be that I forgive with all my heart, those who have sinned against me."

There was a pause during which the priest murmured a prayer.

"Father," said María letting her hand fall on the bed to rouse him from the mystic trance into which he seemed to have fallen: "It strikes me that I ought to tell my husband that I forgive him."

"It is unnecessary, but you can do so."

"Who knows but that a few words spoken in such a solemn moment may not have an awakening effect on his perishing soul."

"Yes, indeed; it is an idea worthy of your lovely character. — We will tell him."

"At such a moment," added María, recurring to the ideas which Paoletti regarded as beneath her, and talking with nervous eagerness, "he cannot contradict me. Ah! he is so ready with his answers when I accuse him that he sometimes confounds me. Once. . . ."

She paused a minute and then went on. "Once he came to me very melancholy and weary. It was a very wet night — and the poor fellow, having lent his carriage to a friend who was ill, was wet to the skin. The same day a friend had died, to whom he was very much attached, a well-known atheist, who, as you know, had constantly shared my poor Leon's studies and opinions. Yes — he was very sad. — I pitied him

as I saw him come in, but I was at my prayers, and I could not interrupt them. He changed his clothes, but he shivered just as much in his dry things as in his wet ones; he was trembling with fever. I ordered the servants to prepare some warm tea for him, and then went on with my prayers, beseeching God that He would touch his heart — but He never heard me! — Suddenly Leon came and sat down by me on a low stool almost at my feet, and took my hand and kissed it; his lips were burning: 'I want to love and to be loved,' he said. 'Living like this, we are like two thistles growing each by itself in a field.' It was all I could do not to listen to him. I was obliged to put down my prayer-book, but I went on praying without it, and kept my eyes fixed and my mind concentrated on holy things, so as to keep out all other thoughts. That very day you and I had talked together for a long time about the tactics employed by an infidel mind to entrap the godly. I fortified myself by recalling your words and let the electric current of affection that came from me to him pass by. I remained a perfect statue; I knew that I ought to be angry, so I was, and I flung his atheism in his teeth. He shivered with his chill and said: 'Well, as my home is empty for me, I will go to some asylum.' What things he said! 'I want to love and to be loved,' — he said that again and again. He would laugh and pay me compliments like a boy; then he would talk about the house, and the children we never had. — But I was firm and as cold as ice, for if I had shown him the least tenderness, how elated he

would have been, and I utterly humiliated! — And I should have felt that my humiliation was the abasement of the Christian Faith and Church. My plan was traced out for me — and how wisely! I rose from my knees: 'Be converted and then I will listen to you,' I said, and I left him alone. — How well I remember that night. I remember that as I went into my own room, I was quite grieved to see him so cold, and I took a cloak down from the door. I had begun my prayers again in my room when I heard him say: 'Curses on those who made you what you are!'"

"But my beloved daughter," said Paoletti, "you are agitating yourself unduly with these reminiscences."

"I think I can see him now!" she went on with an ecstatic fire in her eye. "He was so pale, and his eyes were full of a desolate melancholy — he looked like a hungry child that puts out its arms to seek its mother's breast and finds a stone. — I fancy I can still feel the rough touch of his beard on the back of my hand, and the weight of his weary head on my knees. I did not let it rest there, but I looked at him, asking myself why God had allowed materialism and disbelief to find a place in such a handsome head. And there is something fascinating in his black eyes — the grasp of his hand is so firm and manly — he has a combination of gravity and brightness — strength that does not detract from the beauty. . . ."

"Friend of my soul," interrupted Paoletti, "I conclude that when you dwell at length on his perfections,

it is only to wonder how the Omnipotent in his supreme wisdom could join them to a blind soul, spiritually dead."

"Just so, just so. — But these memories crowd upon me and I cannot shake them off. They are too strong for me. — I remember one day, after several days of disagreement, he came into the room quite furious. It was the first time I ever saw him in a passion, and it frightened me excessively. He spoke very violently, took my hand and shook it as if he wanted to wrench it off. I fell on my knees. — I fancy I can feel his hand now with a grip like a vice; oh! if I really felt it I believe it would make me wish to live! — He said cruel things to me, but even though he was so angry, he could not be brutal. This sudden fit of rage was in fact a joy to me, for it showed me how much he loved me; but as I had no doubts of his fidelity I did not choose to make any show of affection. I knew very well that he would not hurt me, so I said to him: 'You may kill me if you like, I do not care; but give me an hour — I am dividing my clothes among the poor.' That was the truth; above a hundred poor wretches were waiting at the door. I was so proud of my charitable action that I could afford to despise the tyrant. — And he said: 'It is horrible to have a wound aching in one's soul and not to be able to return blow for blow, to take the smallest revenge, to kill or even to punish. . .' But ah! he was splendid in his wrath."

"Enough of this," said the priest with sudden decision. "I cannot allow another word of these mem-

ories which imperil your soul. You, who could then struggle to keep your spirit pure, will surely not succumb now."

"No, I will not succumb" — said María, but there was a look of anguish in her white face which betrayed what it cost her to break the mysterious chains that held her even in this supreme hour. "I have mortified myself indeed, and fought many battles to divest my mind of the sense of his attractions, and see the bare and hideous skeleton of the man. It was you who advised me to think of him as a skeleton — and it has been my salvation. — For my soul would inevitably have been lost. — Father, would it not? — if I had yielded to his persuasions. It would have led me into sin — Father, would it not? — He would have triumphed over me spiritually speaking and have led my soul astray — Father, would he not?" And at each question, betraying her doubts and inward struggle, the priest replied by an emphatic sign of assent. "I said to him: 'I am yours in all indifferent matters, but my spirit you shall never subdue.' — Sometimes I forced myself to pass weeks without saying a word to him — I was right, was I not?"

"My poor unfortunate friend," said Paoletti with a sigh, "you are asking me things you have asked a thousand times before. Let us turn over this gloomy page which we have amply discussed already, and discourse of God and of forgiveness. . ."

"Of forgiveness!" said María raising her head without moving her body. "Of what forgiveness?"

Her eyes had the wild glare that prognosticates de-

lirium; she suddenly sat up in bed and clasping her hands to her head, exclaimed:

"I do not forgive, I do not forgive — I cannot — my husband only — I forgive him. Leon I will forgive you if you will return to me. — Not her, not her. . ." She could say no more; she threw up her arms and fell back as if she were dying.

Paoletti gazed at her in horror; María kept her eyes fixed on his with a crazy glare. The priest felt the cold sweat start on his brow, and his heart beat as though it would burst his ribs. Presently María closed her eyes; the crisis wore itself out in exhaustion, sighs, and sobs. Paoletti said in tones which he meant to be awful:

"Thou Soul! that I believed to be victorious, and that art yet yielding to the Foe: God will not forgive those who show no forgiveness!" And falling on his knees, he took the crucifix between his hands and prayed in silence. He was in truth in deep distress — a shepherd striving to save his favourite lamb. For some time María neither spoke nor moved. At length, with a deep sigh, she said in accents of despair: "I am a miserable sinner and cannot hope to be saved."

The hapless tortured soul was struggling like a shipwrecked wretch, one hand stretched up to Heaven and the other feeling for earth.

"I am overwhelmed with grief," said Paoletti looking up, and his face was wet with sincere tears. "The soul that I believed I had won to fill a glorious throne in Heaven, has suddenly fallen into the abyss. . . ."

"Into the abyss," echoed María with a heart-breaking sob.

"And still I beseech the Lord that he will save it—that he will save this most precious soul; that he will not condemn it, that he will have mercy upon it.—Oh! Merciful Saviour I have seen her Thine, wholly Thine, and to see her now, given over to Satan!—Is she not a pearl of great price? How canst Thou bear that she should fall into the pit of everlasting punishment? Hast Thou not purified and tried her as a jewel to be worn by Thee throughout eternity? Hapless soul," he went on, turning to María, "listen to my last appeal if you hope not to see the robe of purity and beatitude turned into one of agonizing flames. Return to a better mind; to that sweet and elect state which affords greater delights than the most exquisite perfumes, the most delicious food, and the loveliest sights on earth. Save thyself yet, if not from this world, at least from Hell!"

This vigorous allocution produced its effect; the reverend orator continued to pour out his poetical eloquence, not without feeling though somewhat theatrical and full of figurative rhetoric; and lavishly adorned with "celestial splendour, seraphic choirs, divine love, and white-robed spirits." When he had ended, María, kissing the crucifix that her pastor put into her hands, shed a few bitter tears as she said:

"I resign all to Thee, blessed Redeemer—there is no leaven in my soul of baser affections. I resign them all with my life and cast them into the fire. Still, one

thing remains; but you, Father, who can do everything, can pluck out this last thorn from my heart."

"What is that?"

"Prove to me that Pepa's child is not my husband's."

"How can I prove that, unfortunate woman?" cried Paoletti thunderstruck. "How should I know the secrets of hearts? It may be so, my child — and it may not." And then the worthy man, knowing only the surface of human nature and not the depths of the heart, added in perfect good faith: "She is a pretty little girl."

This was seizing a spear to pierce the heart and shorten the agony. María writhed in her bed.

"Noble and beautiful soul," exclaimed Paoletti rising to his feet with glowing looks and an uplifted hand: "Throw off this last earthly anxiety, cast away these dregs of life, and keep the vessel pure to receive the precious water of eternal glory."

"I want to be saved," murmured María, who now looked more dead than alive.

"Then free yourself, purge your soul completely, and forgive."

"I do — I will — I forgive. . ." The words sounded like the faint mysterious whisper of a soul escaping, and dying on the lips of the speaker.

"Forgive, and your salvation is assured." The priest seemed to grow taller with his solemn and mystical enthusiasm. María's was mingled with a superstitious terror which made her hair stand on end, and

hang dishevelled like grass swept down by the swift rush of a passing train.

"Kiss this sacred image," said Paoletti, "and forget the world — totally, absolutely."

"I do," murmured María from the depths of the gulf of self-mortification into which she had fallen.

"That there is such a thing as a man or woman in it."

"I do," said the voice, more softly, as though from a lower depth.

"Let it be quite indifferent to you whether your body is at Suertebella or in your own house. Mortify your self-love to a conviction that the temporal triumphs of the wicked cannot affect you. Divest yourself of every feeling of aversion for this house, and remember that the chapel here is dedicated to St. Luis Gonzaga, whose very image and portrait our beloved Luis was."

This reminiscence seemed to rouse María.

"Yes — I am reconciled to the place. The mere sound of your name, my most blessed brother, fills me with joy. May your glorified spirit come to succour mine."

"Amen, amen!" María kissed the crucifix.

"I wish all I possess — if I possess anything — to be given to the poor. You and my husband will agree about that. I wish to be buried by my brother's side, and let Masses be said over my body at the altar of the saint I most venerate: St. Luis Gonzaga."

"Yes, my beloved daughter. It cannot matter to so noble a soul that the altar is at Suertebella."

"Nothing matters, I forgive with all my heart. — I am reconciled to my Saviour and can hope!"

Paoletti with outstretched hands and half-closed eyes solemnly, slowly pronounced absolution.

"Now that you are reconciled to God," he said with some emotion, "you can receive the Holy Sacrament."

CHAPTER XIX.

VULNERANT OMNES, ULTIMA NECAT.

THE ceremony took place at dusk with great pomp and unction. The palatial house of Suertebella was admirably suited to the ostentatious display of a splendid ceremonial, the tribute of worldly wealth to an august mystery. Exquisite flowers, and tapers innumerable are thought the most proper offerings to do honour to the Lord of Lords. Amid such dazzling accessories even the works of human hands showed to greater advantage; as though they too borrowed a reflection of glory from the presence of the Deity. The sounds of weeping which were audible here and there — in a corner of the Chinese boudoir, or from behind some Greek statue, whose majestic features looked like an embodiment of the perfect balance of spirit and matter — added to the melancholy solemnity of the scene. Piety and dread, the one founded on reverence and the other on the approach of Death, were blended into a single emotion.

The priest of Polvoranca brought the sacred Host from the church in a carriage sent for the purpose and followed by a long train in slow procession. The very horses seemed to understand that they ought to make no noise and step quietly. The portico was crowded

with people, under the ruddy glare of the torches they held, in liveries and in plain dress — masters and servants, all alike on their knees.

The little bell with its mysterious sound of consolation and awe, echoes through the long corridors rousing the marble figures from their stony dreams. Comic or grave, the works of art seem to put on a semblance of Christian reverence; the polished floors reflect the gleam of tapers; flowers and tapestries seem to bow in silent worship. Footsteps sound heavily on the boards; they might be the distant roll of muffled funeral drums. Presently they fall more dully on the carpets, suggesting a subterranean procession. At last they come to a standstill — there is silence as of the grave: the procession has reached the chamber of death. Then for a while the whole house is deserted; all the inhabitants have collected in the immediate vicinity of the closing scene. Those who cannot actually witness it can fancy themselves in that room, filled with light and suffering, and they sob and revel in the picture, imagining what they cannot see. It is easily conjured up, and their spirits quake before it. In the halls and passages, all deserted and all blazing with tapers, the still air gives an impression of suspended breath, speechless and awe-stricken. There is not a sound — except that in some remote corner there is a rustle — as it were a whisper — of a woman's dress that stealthily hastens by and is lost in the distance.

Time goes on. Then at first a murmuring drone is heard, steps again — the servants reappear with their

heavy tapers — the noise grows louder — the shadows of the living fall on the painted figures on the walls and across the waxed floors — the procession closes with a gaudy array of liveries and dresses of every colour, men and women of every degree; some quite callous faces, others really sad or pitiful — the whole with its accompaniment of prayer and response from the priest and his acolytes. This procession, in which some walk with a sort of rapture of grief while others are chilled with dread, makes its way to the sound of a bell rung by a boy — the very boy known to Monina as Guru — and goes out again through the hall and portico where some kneel to see it depart and others still follow with bared heads. — Within, the scent of the flowers hangs about the house as though it were the mysterious breath of the invisible Guest who has passed through it.

"I am the Way and the Life and the Truth."

All the family had been present; the marquesa prostrate on the floor in her anguish, unable even to kneel, while her husband and sons were bitterly and sincerely grieved. When the Sacrament was ended they separated, all closely attended by their most intimate friends. Milagros entirely lost consciousness; she was carried to a sofa in the Chinese room where her kind friends plied her with restoratives and sought to give her consolation. The marquis, forgetting his interest in the art and curiosities of the house, fled from

his importunate comforters, and begged to be left alone. He buried himself in a recess in the tapestried room, behind a marble Satyr, and gave himself up to meditations on the vanity of human grandeur. Gustavo devoted himself to his mother and submitted to the jeremiades of the poet of "pious raptures" and "white souls." Leopoldo did nothing but sigh; he was nervous and tremulous, for the cold hand of death had come so near to him that he fancied he could feel its touch.

Numbers of visitors were departing, and in the park stood rows of carriages, the coachmen addressing each other by their master's name: "Garellano! You there?" — "Cerinola, you're wanted." — "Lepanto, move on a little."

It was a beautiful night, calm and clear, lighted by a pallid, full moon; the distant horizon looked deceptively like a calm sea. The smaller stars sank into insignificance, but the larger ones shone brightly, trembling rather than twinkling. Nature was lovely and seemed to breathe forth peace and love. It was an hour to be born in, rather than to die in.

Nothing can make man feel so dwarfed as the contemplation of the sublime indifference of the skies to all the woes of earth. The most disastrous moral revolution could never give rise to the tiniest film of cloud. All the tears of weeping humanity will never form a single drop of water in infinite space.

Leon came out of his wife's room to express his thanks to the master of the house.

"My dear friend," said Fúcar, wringing his hands,

"accept the sincere condolences of a much troubled man. I myself am the victim of a very serious misfortune."

"Is any one ill?"

"No, no; we will discuss it another day — this is not the time. — Nay, nay, you have nothing to thank me for; it was no more than my duty. As you see I ordered them to decorate the house properly — suitably for so solemn a ceremony, and as befits my firm religious convictions. I had all the camellias brought in from the green-house, and all the rhododendrons and orange-trees in those heavy wooden tubs . . . but there are occasions when I grow reckless, when I think even exaggeration is not out of place . . . You shall know all in good time . . . we will talk it over. . ."

He went off to Madrid in his carriage, reflecting on the catastrophe in his house, on the bad government of a nation which, the day after issuing one loan, found it necessary to start another.

Leon went back to his wife's room. The end was at hand. Rafaela, Paoletti, Moreno Rubio and himself gathered round María who, since the last words of confession she had uttered had been rapidly sinking, and looked every moment more like death. Her face, which nature had moulded on a type of ideal beauty, looked even more perfect at this moment, when physical vitality was almost extinct; and its fixity and whiteness, the immobility of that calm repose on the pillow, the sculpturesque stillness of every feature and muscle betraying no sign of suffering, made her look like some marble image

of Death — noble and dignified, with nothing vulgar in its details — aristocratic, if so to speak, and wrought to grace the monument of some great lady. She lay motionless; she was privileged to enter the dark realm with tranquil deliberation and free from bodily pain, as we pass from one scene to another in the varying phases of a dream.

Her half-closed eyes, under their black lashes, were fixed on her husband's gloomy and rigid face. Leon stood by the bed, gazing sadly at the loveliness to which Death was lending a sublimer beauty, and reflecting in a vein of sentimental philosophy on this transformation of his wife into a statue. The solemnity of the scene, the silence, broken only by her breathing which grew more difficult every moment, the sad fixity of those dying eyes, fastened on him like a mysterious tendril that could not be torn away, filled his brain with thoughts of himself and of her, — two beings who called themselves husband and wife, and between whom there was no link but that gaze. He sounded the depths of his soul, trying to find in it some faded remnant of love, that he might offer it as a last blossom of conjugal devotion to the woman who lay there dying in the cold solitude of mysticism; but he sought in vain — he could find none. All the wealth of love and regard that his heart had once contained had been diverted from its legitimate centre, and been stored and hidden in another part of his nature.

But though he found no affection, the beautiful creature who had been the pride of his earlier life filled

him with such deep and keen pity that he could, in that hour of grief, have mistaken it for love. As he watched the ebb of that life which might have been the crown and joy of his own, Leon felt the tears rise to his eyes and a tight grip on his heart. "Unhappy woman!" he thought to himself. "May God forgive you for all the ill you have done me; I mourn for you as if I had loved you; and I pity you, — not so much for dying young but for the cruel disappointment in store for you when you learn — and you must learn it soon — that the love of God is only a sublimer development of love for those whom he has created!"

He went closer to her, attracted by her eyes which had opened a little wider; he looked at the soft, almost invisible down that shaded her lip, the bright light in her eye, with its tawny hazel iris; he felt the warmth of her breath — now scarcely perceptible. — Poor soul, poor soul! There are no words to describe the pathos which she could not utter in words, but only by the last gleam of those eyes that were almost extinct.

Behind the external calmness of her attitude and the steady gaze of her eye, who knows what anxieties, what torments, nay what petty worries may not have been racking her and dull jealousies vaguely stirring in the depths of her dying soul — since there was no physical means of giving them utterence! but the surface betrayed nothing, just as the frozen surface of a river prevents our hearing the swift and noisy flow of the deeper current.

Leon understood this. He saw a tear glittering in

each of María's eyes: the last and only means of expression for the one surviving human feeling of her soul, brought from the unsounded depths to which the world still clung by a slender root of desire. Two half-formed tears, that did not overflow, were all that came to light from that hidden fount. Leon bent down and pressed his lips firmly to her cold forehead; as he did so he heard a sigh of satisfied longing. A strong shudder ran through her frame and in a steady voice she said: "Ah! Thanks!"

There was silence — an awful silence, while María Egyptiaca was tossing on the threshold of the invisible land, like a grain of sand flung up by the waves on to a shore where human ken cannot penetrate. The bystanders murmured with a sigh that she was dead — they might speak aloud now. Leon closed her eyes with a timid hand — he was afraid of hurting her.

The priest on his knees prayed in silence, his eyes tightly shut, like a prisoner whose dungeon windows are closed with double shutters. Leon stood for a few minutes, gazing at the remains of one of the most beautiful women of her day — with the added reputation of being the most saintly of her native city; and he shuddered with grief as he remembered the past, and realized what his present feelings were. How sad was the stillness of those limbs not yet cold, of the features in which beauty so masked death, that it would not have been hard to call death life and life death.

Deeply agitated, and with his heart oppressed with intense pity, he quitted the room, feeling as if he had

left his youth behind him. The devout watchers and some of the servants remained there; Paoletti withdrew to the chapel. The news flew through the house; there was a sound of weeping, the bustle of attendants rushing for restoratives, the sighs and lamentations of friends coming and going. Leon took refuge in the hall of Hymen, where he threw himself on a couch and lay staring at an antique clock, which bore an inscription on a semicircle above the dial, like a frowning brow: *Vulnerant omnes, ultima necat.*

CHAPTER XX.

IN THE *INCROYABLE* DRAWING-ROOM.

He called together the servants and a few faithful friends, and having made all the necessary arrangements he withdrew to the end of the house nearest to his own room. He felt he must be alone. In the midst of his regrets he felt a certain satisfaction in having fulfilled his duty to his wife to the last hour of her life. He ordered his servant on no account to allow any one to disturb him, and he locked himself in the *Incroyable* drawing-room.

At last he could enjoy the solitude he longed for; he could think over the course of events, his own position and the state of his mind; he cast a glance at the past, and another at the future.

The painful struggle which he had carried on for so long with an ideal differing from his own was now over. He was free. But his freedom was tainted with sorrow, for it had been granted him by death; and he had been released from his fetters by a beautiful and melancholy being, whom he could by no means hate but only pity and respect. The obstacle that death had removed, and which dwelt not merely in his memory but in his heart, had won his tender sympathy by the mere fact of

her pathetic end. It lent her the halo of innocence, and the radiance of an angel.

Still dwell as he might on this image — an interesting and touching one if not actually beloved — he could not help feeling an impulse of happiness. The future was before him. A door stood open — the door to a new life, where perhaps he might find the realisation of the dream he had indulged in so vainly in the past life which was now buried in a peaceful grave. The sense of recent loss made him afraid to contemplate the future and kept his fancy so far chastened that he did not rush into visions of rapturous days nor build castles in the air, either in the sunny regions of the probable, or the darker chaos of the purely imaginary. It was with real pain that he felt the homage of pious respect to the past chequered by visions of the future. But hope, like remorse, is so inevitably a part of the logic of events that it can be considered part and parcel of our conscience. We cannot lock the door on remorse when that intruder knocks and insists on admittance; and in the same way, we cannot turn away hope when it comes, walks in, calls us, invades us, takes possession, settles itself deliberately, and unrolls the enchanting panorama of happiness to come. No wilful blindness will avail to prevent our gazing on the horizon of life which is lighted up by hope; nay, there is not a moment, however painful, which is not linked with those hoped-for moments still remaining in store in the unknown future. Life is a constant anticipation of something remote and before us; indeed, nature herself has

understood this law, for none of the superior creatures have eyes behind them.

Thus he sat debating and suffering, not choosing to let his thoughts wander whither they inevitably tended, and taking a morbid pleasure in trying to relink his broken chain. He felt a certain pride in setting aside every thought of his own advantage, however legitimate, and tried to force his fancy to a dignified indifference to the more pleasing aspect of the events of the night. But though the spirit has wondrous sails that bear it onward, and without which it could make no way, it no less needs that ballast which is called egoism. Egoism is indispensable; without it the sails would flap idly, and man would be the toy of the hurricane. With it, and bereft of sails, he would be no better than a hulk. The perfect vessel is one in which the sails and the ballast are rightly proportioned.

As he reflected thus, Leon Roch made up his mind that he could not be a hulk. Nay — he had just flung all his ballast overboard to sail, as swift as lightning, over the waters of a bright ideal when he heard a noise — a sound that made him thrill as the rope of the topmast vibrates before a rising storm — the rustle of a woman's dress and the murmur of a sigh. He looked up and Pepa Fúcar stood before him.

Her aspect startled him, he could not ask her any questions. Her face was like that of a corpse that has risen from the grave in sheer terror of death. Her teeth chattered as though she were cold. Tragedy itself looked out of her eyes; in her hand she held a paper.

With a great effort Leon said:

"For God's sake leave me in peace — my poor wife is dead."

"And I . . ." but she could not speak; she was trembling, as though the chill of the grave had fallen on her. At last she finished her sentence:

"I came, some time since, to tell you that my husband is alive."

Leon sat as if he had not heard; it was his conscience which cried out:

"Your husband!"

"Is alive."

She put her hand to her head, feeling as if all the blood in her body were surging there.

"Have you seen him?"

"Yes, and I should have died of fear if it had not been that you are here to protect me against that ruffian!"

These words roused Leon from a sort of stupor.

"I — what have I to do with it?" he exclaimed as though trying to fight his way out of this terrible nightmare by some hypocrisy of dignity. "Leave me. Have I anything to do with your husband — or with you either?"

In his soul a storm was raging which he was trying to quell by decency, honour — walls of sand which broke down at a touch. His brain was in a whirl, and conscious of no desire but that he could hate instead of loving her, he ordered Pepa to leave the room. Giving

way to an impulse — whether of disgust or of honour he hardly knew, he said:

"Leave me — I desire you to leave me. Do not disturb me. I do not want you. I cast you from me — I turn you out. . ."

"You are not in your right mind," said Pepa sadly, "you can turn me out of the room — but not out of your heart."

"Did you come here to mock me?" he went on wildly, "when I most deserve your respect . . . What you have told me is a lie."

"Ah! would to God it were!" said the poor woman clasping her hands. "My father told me the dreadful news this morning; but I did not think he would dare to appear before me. But this evening, I was sitting in my room, and I heard a noise in the garden— I went to the window — I saw a man — it was he. The light from the hall lamp fell on his hated face — I saw him and knew him. I thought the earth would open and swallow me — I was shivering with cold and fear. I could not help running — running all over the house, and fancying I heard him close behind me and felt his hand on my shoulder. I rushed out of the back door — if there had been no door I must have jumped out of the window. I went into the yard — I could not stop — out into the street. There I took a hackney carriage and flew here to tell you. I waited a long time in the museum; then I was out of patience. . ."

"And the child?"

"She is not at home. I should have brought her

with me if she had been; but Papa had taken her this evening to see Countess Vera. I had intended to go too — but I knew what was going on here and I could not bear to go into company; I said I was not well enough."

"And what a time for coming here!" exclaimed Leon bitterly. "You cannot even comfort me."

"Why, what do you object to in my presence?"

"It is a profanation, a scandal! I have no words for it; it fills me with a horror that I cannot overcome."

"I am not to blame for what has happened. — It is God's will and ordering. — But do not let us lose time in lamentations; let us consider, let us decide what we are to do."

"Who?"

"We — you and I. — Will you abandon me to my fate in this unequal struggle? Do you know what that wretch means to do? — My father told me all about it. He has been two days in Madrid staying in his uncle's house on purpose to spy me and watch me. — I do not know who can have told him, his uncles I suppose. Gustavo is his lawyer, and he is going to bring a charge against me. — And the base wretch could write to my father this morning, declaring that he had repented of all his wickedness, and imploring his forgiveness. — Inside that letter there was a note for me. Read it."

Leon's first impulse was to refuse to look at the letter; but he snatched it out of Pepa's hand, he knew not how or why; and read as follows:

"A man who is dead has no right to expect fidelity in the wife who survives him. Happily for me, the Almighty saw fit to save my precious life. As the moment draws near when I may hope to embrace my wife and child, I have the honour of informing the first of those beloved beings that I have made up my mind to forgive her, provided she hastens to submit to my authority as a husband, seeing that my supposed departure from this world is some excuse for her delinquency. At the same time if the above-mentioned beloved being persists in believing that I am still food for the fish in the Gulf of Mexico, I hereby take the liberty of assuring her that I shall avail myself of the rights granted to me by law. My dear daughter cannot be allowed to grow up in the lap of such a mother. I am sure that the lady whose husband I have the honour to be will not prefer the delights of a criminal attachment to the sweet duties of motherhood — but, if she should, I shall bring an action in due form, having an abundance of witnesses who can prove the preliminary information required by law, and I shall claim my daughter, since the law will place her in my paternal care as soon as she is three years old.

"In order that my estimable wife may fully appreciate the strength of my position as an injured husband, I would beg her to spend an hour in her father's library, and there, in the third book-case, on the second shelf, she will find the last edition of the code, in which interesting work I would advise her to study Act 20, cap. I, clause II. F. Cimarra."

"That is the man, all over!" exclaimed Leon crumpling up the paper. "His style, his insolence, his mean irony, his absolute lack of decency and feeling. I know the hand that strikes me — God in Heaven! If such an attack, from such a villain, is not enough to justify a man in trampling on all law and custom, in forgetting his dignity nay, and his conscience — if this is not an excuse for rebellion and fury, I do not want to live! — life is not worth having!" He flung the paper on the floor and Pepa set her foot on it.

"And I will do the same to you, vile wretch, and your latest Code!" she exclaimed. Then she dropped on the sofa and bursting into tears she went on:

"And to think of my baby, my little Monina in the hands of that ruffian. Monina, who is my only joy, snatched away from you and me! The mere thought of such a thing drives me mad."

Leon looked at the floor with stern determination.

"A bold stroke on my part may save us yet," said Pepa, looking up with a resolute flash.

"Hush — wait — " said Leon anxiously putting up his hand. "Listen."

They were silent, holding their breath even.

And they heard in the corridor the slow solemn steps of many men carrying some heavy burden. The sound came nearer, passed, and died away. Pepa and Leon each in the attitude of holding the other back, listened in reverent silence to the procession that passed so near to them. Their beating hearts seemed to throb in unison. When silence had once more fallen on the

house Leon looked at Pepa who had bent her head and whose eyes were full of tears.

"Are you praying?" he said.

"Oh! God!" exclaimed Pepa clasping her hands over her heart. "She is at peace,—I am tortured with grief and anxiety; she is enjoying eternal bliss as the reward of her virtues, and I am pointed at as a guilty creature, threatened with persecution, and my wretched heart is to be made the sport of the tricks of the law.— No, merciful Lord! I never prayed that she might die in order that I might triumph and be happy—that I never asked. I was not so wicked, and I do not deserve such punishment.— I hated her sometimes it is true, but not now, not now. I do not know whether I am afraid of her now, or whether it is only reverence that keeps her always in my thoughts —I see her before me wherever I turn, dead, and yet living."

"She is happy!" said Leon in dull tones.

"But we have no time to be melancholy. We must decide, and act at once. Listen, I have a plan; the best, the only plan. . . ."

"A plan."

"Yes, I will tell you. First I must fetch my child. I feel as if they wanted to take her from me, as if you and she and I were in danger. . . ."

"Fetch her now, at once."

"It is only ten o'clock. There is time to go and return quickly. I have spoken to Lorenzo, our best

coachman, and the carriage is waiting. Will you promise to wait here till I return?"

"Yes, I promise," said Leon looking at her but beyond her. "Fly and fetch Monina; bring her quickly; I too am afraid. . . ."

"Till then do not stir from hence. . . ."

She went away through the museum.

Leon for a long time could not restore order in his mind. Before deciding on any definite course of action it was necessary to form a clear idea of the situation in its true aspect and proportions, without regarding it as better or as worse than it really was. But in spite of every effort he could not think with any kind of lucidity; all mental discipline was lost to him. His utter physical exhaustion and the moral chaos that had come upon him had resulted in a sort of lethargy, in which his brain was lulled to sleep while his senses ran riot in feverish disorder. We have once before seen him in a similar mood.

The room seemed to assume a circular shape, for his eyes were incapable of taking exact note of what they saw, and the walls spun round him and with them in a giddy whirl the objects that adorned them. These were for the most part engravings, plates, jars, medals and plaster reliefs of the time of the French *Directoire*, when a revolution in taste took place as a trivial corollary to the revolution in politics. After cutting off heads the mania for innovation set to work to reform hats. Industry had no mind to retire in favour of liberty, and on the top of the mound of skulls piled up

during the reign of terror, it stuck a dress-maker's doll.

There were men tightly buttoned into impossible coats, choked in yards of neck-cloth, and crowned with incredible hats. Some carried knotted sticks, others twisted canes; they were curled like the Furies and shod like dancing-masters. Some had huge chains with seals like bell-clappers hanging from their pockets; in some it was difficult to distinguish their legs from their skirts, or where the man ended and his clothes began. They looked like objects in a nightmare, chimeras, the distorted metamorphosis of human beings into long-legged wading birds with glasses on their bills and buskins on their feet. The women displayed more than their ankles in tightly-drawn stockings, and on their heads wore towers of felt, fur and feathers, buckram, and ribbands; mounds, weather-cocks, pagodas, spires or tubs. If a crowd of witches had set up for being fashionable they might have appeared in such a guise.

All these figures seemed to be flying in a mad race round the room. They were a motley rabble, a whirling tornado of cudgels, legs, noses, eyeglasses, petticoats, fans and hats, whence proceeded whistling, shouts, scoffing and laughter. All humanity rammed into a cannon as large as the world, and fired off into the air in a million fragments, could not have covered the sky with a more hideous cloud.

Leon saw a figure step out of the circle and come towards him, and he suddenly felt an impulse of rage,

just like that which he had felt in the morning against his brother-in-law — a rage which now no consideration of respect interfered to quell. The hateful figure that approached him was the most grotesquely monstrous of all that crazy rout; his mean smile was an insult to human reason, to decency, to virtue, to everything that distinguishes man from brutes.

"Horrible wretch!" Leon cried — or fancied he cried, rushing upon him, and seizing him by the collar. "Do you think I am afraid of you? Why do you take her from me? Yours! do you say she is yours? But I will give you a lesson and rid society of your vile presence. . . ."

He clutched his victim with all his strength, saying:

"You have rights? I trample them under foot. You have ties? I break them. You shall soon see what I care for your rights and ties — no more than for your life, which is full of evil and disgrace. I loathe you as the embodiment of all the wickedness on earth. — Respect you? Respect the law, the sacrament which you represent as I respected them in her who is no longer of this world? — How dare you name her in the same breath with yourself? In her I respected the austerity of virtue, of exalted piety, honour, innocence, weakness and beauty. But what is there in you but corruption, lies and foulest vice? — It is in vain for you to crave my pity: pity was not made to bestow on venomous reptiles. Do not ask me to let you have your child. — Shall an angel be thrown to the dogs? —

Your child loathes you, your wife hates you, I — I will murder you!"

He felt as though he were rolling down a precipice in the dark, with his victim in his grasp. Then he unconsciously sank into a troubled slumber that lasted some time. He woke in a calmer frame of mind; though still confused, he could make out surrounding objects, and by degrees saw them more distinctly. The figures on the walls were in their places, as insolently lifelike as ever, not more hideous or more pleasing than of old. Leon heard not a sound; everything was still. He looked at his watch; it was half-past eleven.

His first clear idea was that he must at once quit the house and go to his own home.

He thought of María dead, and of Pepa living, — he saw them as though they had been standing side by side in front of him; and at the same moment, as if his thought had evoked her presence, Pepa came into the room from the museum with Monina in her arms.

CHAPTER XXI.

IMPOSSIBILITIES.

"HERE she is!" she said with pride. "You see I have had to carry her."

She was quite out of breath and could scarcely speak.

The poor little child, sleepy and cross, allowed Leon to take her in his arms and laid her head on his shoulder only to fall asleep again.

"Have you nothing to say to him?" said Pepa, caressing one of her little hands. "Mona, my pretty one, tell him what I said to you."

The little one shut her eyes, murmured a few words and gave herself up to sleep, without a fear or a care, on the very brink of the gulf that yawned at her deluded mother's feet.

"She is asleep," said Leon, gently drawing the curly head to a more comfortable position on his shoulder. "We must talk very softly, since the force of circumstances compels us to meet and to speak."

"We cannot stay here: we should be overheard from the corridor," said Pepa taking him by the hand. "Besides, I must show you something which is in another part of the house. Come with me."

He obeyed her. Pepa opened the door into the mu-

seum. There was a candle which she lighted; she led the way through a room full of old pictures, into a second and a third one, Leon carrying Monina, followed her without a word. At last he saw where he was.

"Here we shall not be disturbed by intruders, or by that mob of simpletons who have invaded the house," she said.

They went into the very room where Monina had lain ill with the croup. A woman was there prepared to take Pepa's orders; she was the wife of one of the men about the place whom Pepa could trust, and as her own maids were at Madrid, she had got this woman to attend to Mona, who was at once put to bed. Teresa sat down by the bed, strictly enjoined to call out if any one came into the room; then Pepa led Leon into the next room.

"This is my own room," she said, "no one can hear us here. And now for my secret. Sit down. Mercy how pale you are! — And I?"

"You are pale, too," said Leon, sitting down wearily.

"We reflect each other," she said, trying to sweeten by a slight jest the gall they both had to drink. Leon was in no mood to notice the elegance of the bedroom, in which the magnificence of the decorations was such as, in the days of faith, was lavished on chapels and altars. He paid no heed to the handsome tables and wardrobes of ebony inlaid with marbles, to the monumental bed, also of ebony, which, with its vast spread of mattresses and pillows, covered with some curious

dark-hued cloth of gold, looked singularly like a catafalque; he did not glance at the religious pictures in their silver frames — some like those that his wife had loved — nor at the elegant lamp that had just been lighted and shed a discreet and moon-like light in the room. At any other time its splendour would have attracted his attention, but not now.

"Your secret? What is your secret?" he said impatiently.

"My secret," repeated Pepa sadly, "it is that we will fly, fly — you have only to consent, and we will go at once — we three, without being seen by a soul."

"Fly! What mad folly!" he exclaimed, striking his forehead with his hand. "And at such a moment! Your conscience, my own, our very love itself rises up in protest against such an idea. Can you forget what has this moment taken place under this roof? — Good Heavens! You expect me to be devoid of the respect and consideration due to the dead! You ask me, when these hands have scarcely closed her eyes —! What should I be if I could consent! I should deserve to fall even lower than those calumniators who are so ready to call me María's murderer. — I cannot conceive that you could love me if you should see me suddenly fall into such depths of baseness, if I were capable of anything so hideously iniquitous and immoral."

Every word was a twist to the rope that was strangling the hapless Pepa. They both were silent for some time, without looking at each other. Suddenly she laid her hand on his arm, gazing at him with hag-

gard eyes, and said in a voice he never before had heard from her:

"Very well — then I will go to my husband."

"What! What do you mean?"

"There is nothing for it but to submit to him. Can I put it more plainly. Either I fly with you, or I go into the wild beast's cage." Leon felt an internal shock; his soul seemed to leap up within him, to bound from its central seat.

"Plainer still?" she went on, going close up to him and leaning over him so that he might mark the angry glare of her small eyes. "Gustavo can give you the fullest details. Gustavo came to Papa this morning to explain to him my husband's claims. Federico is his client; the creature has entrusted the defense of his rights to that man."

"Now I understand why he threatened me with some mysterious punishment. — And were you present at his interview with your father?"

"Yes. — My father had just been telling me that it was this resurrection of the enemy that had been troubling him so much — he had heard that Federico had returned. Pilar told him last night that he was here. — The shock had quite taken away my breath, when in came the pompous lawyer. He came, he said, as the friend of both parties, and most anxious to compromise matters rather than bring them into court. The hypocrite! His roundabout speeches gave us the sensation of the jarring of a machine that wants oiling, which tortures one's nerves and makes one's head ache . . .

My father and he went on for ever so long, beating about the bush with high-flown phrases that made me furious. I should have turned the lawyer out of the house. But you can imagine his ponderous emphasis and the complacent twaddle with which he tormented me — and after talking for an age, he explained that he had already drawn up a statement of the case."

Pepa paused to take breath and recruit her moral energies, of which she seemed to have an inexhaustible supply.

"My father," she went on, "put forward a great many arguments and considerations. I said that the man who was brave enough to take my child from me, might come and drag her out of my arms. I believe that in my indignation I said very rude things to Gustavo. He apologized for his interference, alleging that he was merely an agent. All he wished was that we should come to an agreement, that the best course would be a friendly compromise, so as not to give rise to a scandal. I tried to defend myself against the horrible insinuations as to my own character, but an uneasy conscience checked me; I blundered and hesitated, and in trying to prove myself innocent I believe I did the very reverse."

"And what more did the raving moralist say?"

"He went on for about half an hour quoting laws," said Pepa, again trying to infuse a drop of humour in her bitter cup. "He began with Deuteronomy, went on to the Germans and Tacitus, and then referred to various modern authorities; finally, thinking he had

not bored us enough, he quoted sections, chapters, schedules — what not? I really was amused as I listened to him. . ."

"You were amused?"

"Yes, — I thought what fun it would be to put him in the middle of our big pond and let him declaim to the frogs and fishes. — He was extremely tedious, telling me in the most elaborate and polite terms that the law was entirely on his client's side, and that nothing could be easier than to prove me guilty. He has plenty of witnesses."

"Witnesses? To what? Oh! I do not believe they can prove anything in spite of his malice. But they can calumniate you, disgrace you, drag your name and character in the mire; and you may lose your child when she has reached the age prescribed by law. If we fly we shall only be helping them to prove their case, and then you would be sure to lose the child."

"But if we went a long way off?"

"Do not take a panic. Do not think of flight, which would condemn you unheard. While he brings an action against you, you must invoke the intervention of the law, to prevent him from exercising his paternal authority, on the ground of his extravagance, of misappropriation of moneys, forgery — a whole catalogue of crimes that it will be easy to prove if your father will support you."

"I see what you mean. But you are under a delusion. You do not know the worst."

"What is that?"

"You think, no doubt, that my father warmly took my part?"

"Of course."

"But you are mistaken. Alas for me — and for you, too, dear friend of my soul — we are alone and undefended; everything, every one, is against us: religion, laws, relations — the good and the evil alike — the whole world. When the great Gustavo enlarged on the legal advantage his client had over me I flew into a rage — still, I controlled myself to say that Federico could not insist on exercising paternal authority, and that if he was determined on a quarrel I would accuse him of the things you know of. My father listened to all this very calmly; I saw him ready to yield to all sorts of odious compromises . . . He stuttered and stammered, and made speeches that turned my heart cold: 'My daughter will be reasonable — we must all make some sacrifice — I, if Federico will meet me half way — well, we must see — perhaps we can do everything he wishes — the first point is to avoid a scandal.' — And this point of avoiding a scandal, which he recurred to at least twenty times, showed me that he is not prepared to defend me as I should wish. — A compromise! And with what a man! Good God! Then he talked of coming to terms with Federico's uncles, two very worthy men whom you know; one is a judge in the supreme court and the other president of the examining body — What will come of it all? What do you think of it — what can you say to it?"

"That if your father deserts you, you must fight alone."

"Just so, and I will fight alone. Thank you for that. You restore my courage which my father crushes entirely with his extraordinary antipathy to 'exaggeration,'" exclaimed Pepa with eager vehemence. "If when you know what my weapons are! — It was to show you those that I brought you here. You shall see."

In one corner of the room Leon observed an inlaid cabinet which Pepa now pointed to; it was not very large, of elegant workmanship, but evidently solidly constructed. She went up to this bureau, and opening the outer doors revealed a whole series of smaller doors, pigeon-holes and drawers. She touched a spring and a secret division flew open.

"This part of the cabinet," she said with a smile, "is the *Ark of sorrows.* — Now, do you know that?"

"It is a letter of mine."

"You wrote it to me when you were at college, preparing for the School of Mines . . . Read it and meditate on what you wrote to me then: 'That you were madly in love with me. . .' You may laugh now, if you can, at your youthful folly. — Why did you not treasure up my letters as I did yours? I did not say that my love was a madness, but it filled my soul and moulded my nature, as everything does that is an eternal part of it. — And this; do you know this?"

"It is a tie-pin," he said taking it up. "It was mine."

"Yes — you dropped it in our house one day when you came to dinner. You were engaged then to that poor soul, but I still hoped you would not marry her.— I found it lying on the carpet and I kept it. — And these flowers?"

"They are some camellias I gave you once on your fête day — San José."

"Yes, and the next evening you came to see me in my box and I saw you looking with the greatest interest at. . ."

"Poor flowers! — I did not think to see them again, or that they could speak to me as they do now, reminding me of all the feelings and dreams of my life. Do you know they are not dried up as I should have expected them to be after such a length of time?"

"My kisses have embalmed them and kept them fresh — kisses that I have given them so often! — But we must not delay. Give me all that."

She replaced the objects in their little nook, with as reverent a touch as though they had been the most precious relics.

"Stay there in your melancholy little sleep, poor little treasures," she said. Then she went on: "Now that you have seen the Ark of Sorrows I will show you the Chamber of Horrors!"

She opened a concealed drawer and took out a packet of papers tied together with red tape, like lawyers' letters. Leon took it, understanding what it must contain, and they sat down to examine it.

"Here," said Pepa with a shudder, at the sight of

this record of disgrace, "here is the evidence of the martyrdom I have suffered as the wife of that reprobate: vile secrets that he confided to me under pressure of circumstances, when he wanted money. Every page is the record of some act of villainy that I concealed with the greatest care; the evidence of crimes that I succeeded in frustrating, or which remained hidden among the rubbish of some government office. Look at them, and you will see that I have ample means of proving that my husband is disqualified not merely for exercising paternal rights, but even for holding a place in anything like decent society."

Leon looked through the packet with considerable curiosity, glancing over some things, and reading others with care. There were letters to and from well-known firms, private contracts, memoranda, accounts, papers with government seals, pages which had evidently been extracted from important documents, and a judicial decision which had obviously been signed under a false impression or in a moment of surprise. — When he had examined them all, he returned the packet to Pepa.

"Burn it," he said.

"What?" she exclaimed, holding out her hand, but not taking it in her astonishment. "Shall I find them of no use?"

"No," said Leon.

"How is that? Can I do nothing with them?"

"You can certainly — but. . . ."

"Well?"

"In such painful circumstances it is best to speak

quite plainly. — We owe each other the truth, though it may crush the being we love best in the world."

"I do not understand."

"Burn all this."

"Why?"

"Burn it, — because you must not use it. It is a two-edged sword which will wound you when you use it. Forgive my entire frankness; with this in your hand you could triumphantly attack your husband. Under the feeblest rule of justice there is enough here to throw a man into prison. — But if you achieve that the wretch would meet his fate in good company. . . ."

"In good company?"

"The fact is that, in Spain, men of a certain stamp are never put into prison even if they deserve it. This horrible revelation might easily heap disgrace. . . ."

"On others?"

"Yes, and on one whom you truly love and could not bear to injure. Burn them all, Pepa, for God's sake." The poor woman pressed her hand tightly to her eyes to check her tears. But with a fresh flash of her unquenchable spirit, she took up the packet and replaced it in the Chamber of Horrors, which she locked, saying:

"I will burn them at another time." Then turning to Leon, she said in a low voice:

"Then I can do nothing legally to incapacitate my husband?"

"Nothing.

"Is it impossible that I should take legal measures against him?"

"Impossible. I understand now your father's hesitancy, his weak submission, which is neither more nor less than fear — the fear of going to law with an enemy who has been his accomplice. It is altogether out of the question, my dearest."

"Quite, quite. — Why should we try to find crooked ways of escape? My friend, my lover — husband — all in all, the only soul to which my soul is kin, dare as much as I can dare!" she exclaimed with that fervid courage which sometimes made her so beautiful. "The straight and easy way lies before us, the only way: Flight. The carriage is waiting; there is nothing to stop us, we want nothing. You are rich — I am even richer — everything favours us, urges us to act. . . ."

"Impossible! Madness!" said Leon gloomily.

"Madness? It seems so, I admit, but it is not mad really. — It seems monstrous and scandalous, and yet to me — knowing the danger and knowing the foe we have to deal with it is perfectly natural. Do you suppose I would propose such a thing to you if it were not necessary? You do not know, you do not see that I and Monina and you are in imminent danger. I dread some insult — a duel — a murder. — Every moment is precious. He respects nothing. I expect every instant to see him come in. . . ."

"No, and again no," repeated Leon with a determination that was almost cruel.

Pepa, who with all her temerity was still under his dominion, dared no longer protest against this resolute pride, and insist on taking the only path to happiness that lay open to her. She was afraid that her obstinacy might provoke further difficulties, and she stood looking at the Sphinx, hoping that a solution of the problem might suggest itself, instead of that which to her looked so easy. At length, tired of waiting, she said:

"Then if everything is impossible I must do as my father desires me, and receive the wretch with open arms."

"You, in the power of that brute!" exclaimed Leon; the cord, stretched to the utmost, snapped asunder. "Before that can happen I must have lost every drop of blood in my body."

"Well, if the monster can be gorged with the Code," said Pepa sarcastically, "I will fling my child to him and come to live with you."

"Part with the child?"

"You see, — that is still more impossible. Whichever way I turn I see nothing but impossibilities."

"Nay, there is one point," said Leon meditating, "from which we can look and see something besides the impossible."

"And where is it?"

"You shall know in good time; but first I must talk to your father, and to your husband."

"You?"

"Yes. I will speak with him — or with his uncles

who are honourable and respectable men. Can you imagine no way in which the matter may be settled without flying, or going to law?"

"By my going to him?"

"Without even that."

"I know of none."

"But I do."

"Then you know of some way of working miracles. — No, no miracle will do here. The only real miracle is flight."

"No."

"Then we must fight it; we will fight him together, you and I."

"You and I? Then we should lose, and your child would be taken from you without fail."

"Well then; as you close every way of escape, open another; it is the least you can do."

"To-morrow!" said Leon sadly and looking at the floor: "I will open the only way there is."

"To-morrow!" cried Pepa with a gesture of indignant impatience, and then relapsing into dejection as a glowing cinder suddenly becomes mere ashes. "Your to-morrows kill me!"

"Then you insist on the idea of flying?"

"I insist, because every minute you stay here, that I and my child stay here, but increases the peril for all of us. This night, which to you is one of mourning, is the turning point of my fate. He is capable — how can I tell! I fear the worst and tremble at every sound. I am so miserably afraid. — I know that if he

heard of your being here, he would come and insult you,—fancy your fighting with him! — I am afraid of his insulting her, of his coming before me face to face. He always hated you. . . . I am afraid even that he might assassinate you. — I feel as though every conceivable horror were closing round me — I seem to see blood. — And it would be so easy now to step out of this circle of terrors. Oh! take me away and give me shelter in your house."

"Everything in good time."

"Will you wait for me there?"

Leon was on the point of replying, when he thought he heard steps and talking behind one of the doors.

"Where does that door lead to?" he asked in a low voice.

"Into a room opening into the Chinese boudoir."

"You see; they are watching all we do, listening to all we say. Those are the witnesses preparing their evidence."

"God knows who they may be! Suppose it were my husband..." said Pepa in Leon's ear, like thief talking to thief in the silence of the room they have robbed. "Suppose he were to come in here. He might kill us both and hardly be blamed for it. The law would protect him; you are in his wife's room."

A cold shiver ran through every vein in Leon's body.

"Hush," he whispered to Pepa. "Some one is spying us. But the voices are those of inquisitive women and stupid men servants. They have no weapons but their tongues."

"And we are here that the witnesses may rehearse their parts!" exclaimed Pepa starting away from him and rushing to the door, like a lioness at bay. "Who is there, listening, prying, watching me, with his ear to my keyhole? I am at home, in my own house, and those who treat me with disrespect shall suffer for it!" Then turning to Leon she went on: "And still you doubt! Danger surrounds us — I tremble for your life, for everything I hold dear."

Outside the door there was silence; they heard the soft footfall of women creeping away.

"You hear those cat-like steps," he said. "Cowards like that do not kill, but they will scratch our faces."

As he spoke they both started with alarm at hearing some one come into Monina's room. It was the Marquis de Fúcar. He was much agitated.

"I must speak to my daughter," he said to Leon very solemnly. "What would become of her if an anxious father . . . And then a few words with you, Leon. No, it will be better that I should talk to you first . . . It is a most delicate subject. — I have just come — my dear Pepa, one moment. Leon and I have two words to say to each other. We will go into the child's room."

Pepa was left alone; she could hear the voices of her father and her friend, but could distinguish no words. In a few minutes Don Pedro came back to Pepa alone; she looked anxiously at the door for Leon's return; but, as her father told her, they had agreed that Leon

should not be present at the interview between the father and daughter.

Leon withdrew to the room he had been quartered in, not far from the *Incroyable* room, and spent a night of cruel anxiety and internal struggle. At first it was like a violent argument between two contending parties. Then the turmoil in his soul took the form of crucial questions which had to be answered. Should he fly with her at once? This was not even to be thought of.

Fly with her by-and-bye? He could not decide.

Leave her to the tender mercies — perhaps almost to the brutality — of that other? Out of the question.

For the moment mere decency required him to quit Suertebella, and withdraw to his own house, where he might further consider what remained to be done. This was the obvious thing; but even more obvious was it not to abandon her who so valiantly tried to defend herself. If there was danger for both of them at Suertebella he could do no less than remain there in defiance of the world's opinion. The comments of others on any business of his had become a matter of indifference to him, and he decided to act on the dictates of his conscience, and to defy the judgment of the multitude. By remaining he might baffle the painful impression left by the visits he would be forced to receive next day from his friends and acquaintances — a crowd anxious to offer condolences under any circumstances. Everybody knew what was going on, and it was quite certain that even his slightest acquaintance would come

to see him here on the scene of his misfortune and of this exciting piece of scandal. At first he thought he would decline to receive any one; then he came to a contrary conclusion. No, he would boldly face the intolerable nuisance of curiosity and impertinence. Why not? The social swarm, living on the sweets of their own sins flavoured with the criticism of the sins of other people — he could only despise and not fear them. Besides all this, Don Pedro had begged him to remain and lend his assistance in carrying out a beneficient project which he was turning over in his mind, and which was sure to turn out well though it was neither a contract nor a loan.

CHAPTER XXII.

VISITS OF CONDOLENCE.

LEON was awake and fighting his mental battle till daybreak; then he felt very weary, and locking himself into his room, he slept for some hours with that deep sleep which is apt to visit the condemned wretch on the last morning, a sort of intoxication produced by violent and long-continued sorrow.

It was about ten o'clock when he called his servant to help him dress, gaining much interesting information meanwhile. The señora's body had been carried into the chapel by the kind permission of Don Pedro, and Padre Paoletti had watched by it all night, and would remain there all day and the night to come, praying incessantly. Padre Paoletti, with the parish priests of Polvoranca and the neighbouring village, had performed Mass early that morning at the altar of St. Luis Gonzaga.

Then Paoletti made his appearance to discuss various pious legacies left by the deceased. To all this Leon gave his most anxious attention, and he gave further orders to the priest so that whatever remained to be done might be carried out with all magnificence. The marquis himself came in, and they sat talking for a long time, without excitement or hard words, gloomy

and calm like a couple of diplomatic envoys from conquered nations who in the midst of disaster are anxious to checkmate a victorious usurper.

"It all rests with you," said Don Pedro again and again, with a melancholy expression. "You are master of the situation.'

But even after these words the conversation continued for some little time longer, growing more and more grave and gloomy, till the last sentences sounded almost like a funeral chant. The conference, like some on which the fate of nations has turned, ended in a breakfast. But on this occasion it was eaten in silence and hardly touched, a thing which never happens in politics.

In the afternoon visitors began to arrive. Leon saw a melancholy procession of black coats and heard a succession of sighs which announced the comers like vocal visiting cards. Some with warm and genuine sympathy, and others with total indifference, expressed their sorrow at the event of the previous day; but without mentioning what, thus offering an opportunity for a satirical explanation. Some shook their heads, expressing: "What a world we live in!" Others squeezed his hand as much as to say: "You have lost your wife! When shall I have such a piece of luck!" Two hundred black-gloved hands pressed his in turn. To him, feeling giddy and stunned and paying no attention to their monotonous formulas, all they could say sounded like a hiss and hum of irony. If the *Incroyables* themselves had taken up their parable, speak-

ing through the mass of neckcloth that almost covered their mouths, it could not have produced a more discordant mockery of woe. Some, of course, had come out of sincere regard; some to witness this extraordinary scene, this scandal above scandals; to look close at the widower who, after killing his wife with neglect, flaunted his connection with a married woman under the very roof where the innocent victim had died only a few hours since. This idea lurked perhaps in only a few minds, but it did in some. After paying their respects to the mourner, several went into the chapel to gaze at the dead — beautiful even in death.

At last the dismal crowd grew thinner — only three were left — two — one. He was one of Leon's most intimate friends and he stayed some time. Then Leon was alone.

"Can I speak to you?" he heard a voice say at the door and he started on seeing Gustavo.

"If you will speak briefly and plainly," he replied.

His brother-in-law slowly approached.

"We are quitting this house," he said, "which to us is the abode of sorrow and sin. You, I presume, will remain here, bound to it as you are by interest and passion. We are glad to be free from you. My mother desires me to beg that you will not attempt to see her and take leave of her."

"I had already made up my mind to forego that honour," said Leon coldly. "Pray be good enough to make that clear to all your family."

"Very good. — I can only congratulate myself on

being the very opposite to you," said the lawyer laying his hand on his breast. "I answer your ironical philosophy with Christian charity, and announce to you that my mother, my father, all of us forgive you."

"Thank them in my name. I am edified and delighted by such Christian conduct."

"We forgive you, not merely for the sad end. . ."

"What! again?"

"Not merely for the sad end to which you have brought my sister, but for the insult you have offered to her sainted remains."

Leon sat silent, dignified and sad.

"Do you protest? Do you deny it?" said Gustavo.

"I deny nothing. I have the pleasure, on the contrary, of leaving you undisturbed in the unenviable enjoyment of your base imaginings."

"Then we will drop this odious subject. We are convinced, you are impenitent; each must hold his own. — Before we part for ever I am anxious to have you understand that I have done nothing to encourage Cimarra, or to incite him to attack you. He came to my house, and consulted me; I advised him and drew up his case. All the rest is your own doing."

"Be quite easy. Do not torment your conscience about that man; while defending his lawful rights, you may possibly guide him into the path of salvation."

"Your atheistical mockery cannot disturb my conscience, which, though it is far from spotless, at any

rate can see what is just and right. Whether Federico's repentance is sincere or not I cannot tell. But it is against all sound doctrine to reject a man who confesses his sins and declares he is resolved to act rightly for the future. If he is brought to profess repentance, he may be led to desire it; and the desire is half-way to the accomplishment of the fact. In this respect this man's form of evil has an advantage over your hardened disbelief, since you can never confess nor repent."

"I do beg you," said Leon, "to spare me the soporific treatment of your sermons. The strangest thing about them is that they are in fact grossly heterodox. A pretty apostle the Church can boast of!—Polito might have come to announce the forgiveness of the family, and he would not have preached to me."

"He wished to come, but mamma would not allow it. His impetuous nature fills her with alarm. We all hope that as he is about to undertake the sobering duties of married life he may settle down, and break himself of the vices which scandalize us."

"Leopold is going to be married? Allow me to congratulate the lady, though I have not the pleasure of knowing her."

"The difficulties between my family and the Villa Bojios were all removed last night when the young lady's mother came to call and was most lavish in her affectionate condolences. The Villa Bojios have lately lost a son, and the mothers mingled their tears; it was agreed that Leopold and Susana should be married as soon as we are out of mourning."

"Congratulate your mother for me — I wish her every success."

"The covert satire of your tone is worthy of your utter disregard of our sorrow. — I have had nothing whatever to do with this business, and you yourself know very well that I have bewailed from my heart all the disgrace which has fallen on the family in consequence of my father's misdemeanours, my mother's folly and Polito's vices. You, when I believed you to be honest and honourable, were the confidant of my griefs. Now, when we recoil from you with invincible repugnance, I feel I must tell you that I cannot eat a morsel of bread in peace until we have repaid to the uttermost farthing a man who does not deserve to be our creditor."

"If you mean me, I look for no indemnification. I am sufficiently repaid with ingratitude."

"That is all very fine," said Gustavo sarcastically. "What I have said I have said. Now, we meet no more. My last word is to acknowledge that I was mistaken in saying that you would die of rage: You will live on cynicism. — I know, the carriage is waiting and the trunks packed for a theatrical flight in defiance of social decency and the laws of morality. Well, well; it is no more than might be expected of you. — *Bon voyage*, son of Satan. . . ."

"Your penetration and information as to my proceedings are really remarkable! — Now, if you please we will part."

"It is my desire."

"And I insist upon it. Good-bye."

Not long after, peeping through the blinds, he watched the departure of what had been his family. The marquis, feeble and crushed, was almost carried by the poet who was still in attendance. His wife, really broken-hearted, was a pathetic object. Polito, his throat muffled up in voluminous wraps, gave one arm to the young lady who was to be his wife, while in the other he held a dog. Milagros was supported and almost lifted into the carriage by Pilar and Señora de Villa Bojío. — Whips cracked, the horses pawed, and one, two, three, four coaches rolled across the park bearing away the dozen or so of human creatures, to whom the solemnity of a recent sorrow lent factitious respectability.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE VICTIMIZED HUSBAND.

As evening drew on Leon went into the room where his wife had died. There were a variety of objects left there which he wished to collect and remove. The house was deserted; he could hear the echo of his own steps, and the few lights cast deep shadows. He thought he perceived a figure coming in from the portico to the principal corridor, walking stealthily and softly like a thief, listening to every sound and keeping a sharp look-out. The first flash of suspicion followed by a noiseless explosion of hatred, as the shot follows the match, so startled Leon that his immediate impulse was to hide himself, and watch the intruder unseen. He shrunk behind a hanging and saw him creep by: It was He. Leon perceived it more from an instinctive loathing than by seeing him; just as, in a different sense, a spirit of divination is born of lofty and passionate love.

Cimarra passed him with a cat-like step, prying about cautiously as he went. He turned down a carpeted gallery where the walls were covered with a valuable collection of political caricatures from the comic papers and broadsheets of every country, displayed in a chronological series — the history of a century in mockery

and laughter. In the corners were four old-fashioned screens covered with water-colours for which there had been no room on the walls. Leon slipped behind the nearest and watched the intruder, who sat down on a large divan in the middle. To account for what followed it is necessary to explain that, on arriving at Suertebella, the new-comer had held a colloquy with one of the under-servants on whom he could depend.

"Be so good," he said, "as to go to the chapel and say to Padre Paoletti that I have come here to speak with he knows whom; and that I will wait for him in the gallery of caricatures. Show him the way up the stairs to the tribune, across the old picture-room, and down the little passage."

Soon Leon heard the familiar leaden shuffle. The door of the little passage opened and the priest came in. Leon could see him perfectly, because the gallery had glass doors to the entrance hall which was always brilliantly lighted up at night.

Cimarra hastened forward to meet the confessor; they sat down side by side.

"Your respected uncles," the priest began, "sent me word last evening that you wished to speak with me; but I did not suppose that it would be to-night, or in this house, but later, and in the confessional."

"I have things to discuss with you later and in the confessional," replied the other. "But you understand that here, and to-night, I have something else to talk about. That is to say, dear Señor Paoletti, that there

are two subjects to be discussed — one of considerable interest, and the other very urgent."

"Then begin with what is urgent, and leave what is merely interesting till a future opportunity."

"To begin with what is urgent — I take it for granted that you know all the secrets of this house; I do not of course mean the secrets of the confessional."

"I know none whatever," said the priest drily.

"That merely means that I have no claim on your confidence. But, in short, do you not know what my wife proposes to do? I hear she intends to fly with her lover."

"Sir," said Paoletti sternly, "I know nothing whatever of what you expect me to tell you; I never intrude where I am not invited, and it is a matter of perfect indifference to me whether the guilty persons escape or no. I am here to watch and pray by the body of a sainted daughter and friend, whose spiritual director I had the honour to be."

"I know it. — But you are respected and esteemed by all. Don Pedro highly appreciates you; my wife is very religious, and when she is in trouble she likes to talk about the Virgin *del Cármen*, and the saints. It might have happened that she should have sent for you to console and strengthen her this morning, and this evening you might — how can I tell? You might have known things of which I am ignorant, and you might — you might, just possibly, have been able and willing to give me some information and extricate me from my position of uncertainty."

"I know nothing; nor, if I did, could I lower myself to play the part of the spy and tale-bearer, which you seem to expect," exclaimed Paoletti rather hotly. "You do not know me; your worthy uncles have failed to explain to you the sort of man I am. My office is to console the afflicted and reprove the erring; I have no concern with worldly affairs. Those who need me will find me nowhere but in the confessional. Good-night, Caballero."

He rose to go. Cimarra detained him, holding his robe.

"But I have much to explain to you," he said. "Do not judge me so hastily. If I were to confess, if I were. . . ."

The priest sat down again.

"No, I cannot confess here and now. To you it would be an act of sheer hypocrisy. Such a farce would ill-beseem me. I wish to speak the truth, even though the truth that comes from my lips should deal ruin and terror like ball from a cannon. Allow me, in the first place, to tell you something about myself, that you may the better understand the urgency of my claims.

"I must begin by saying that I always was fully conscious of my own slender merit, and that the moral world was to me a citadel with closed and barred gates. I never had any wish to expose myself to the labour of besieging the citadel or scaling its walls. It was my fortune — or misfortune, which, it is hard to decide — not to believe in God or in anything beyond this

atrocious barred dungeon in which we are confined; and with this comfortable lack of creed I enjoyed a tranquil frame of mind which lulled my spirit to lethargy and enabled me to remain supremely indifferent to the good or bad opinion of others."

The priest, really horrified at hearing such an appalling profession of faith, again turned to go, saying that he was open to confession, but did not profess to tame monsters; but Federico only smiled, and detaining the Italian he went on:

"But stay. I have something to say that may perhaps please you better. — I am weary of it all. I have been rich, and poor; powerful, and a beggar; I have seen all that is to be seen and enjoyed all that is to be enjoyed. With regard to women, I may say that on the whole I despise them; and I have no belief in anybody's virtue. If you ask my opinion of men I can only say with the sceptical poet: '*Plus je connais les hommes plus j'aime les chiens.*'"*

"Allow me to advise you to go and live in the company of dogs, or to found a canine colony where you will feel more at your ease," said Paoletti with grim irony. "I am only waiting to see if any spark of light will flash from the horrible blackness of your soul. But I see none."

"I am coming to a delicate point. You know all about my wife. — When I was supposed to be dead she fell in love with another man. I believe she had loved

* The better I know men, the better I love dogs.

him long before. Pepa hated me from the day she married me. In point of fact I did everything to justify her hatred. I treated her ill, I degraded her, I compromised her again and again by my pecuniary delinquencies; I spent her money on other women; my language was not refined, any more than my behaviour; I looked upon her as a useful piece of property, neither more nor less."

"Enough of this!" exclaimed the priest, starting away from him as though he were some loathesome vermin. "If this is a confession of sin I will listen to it; but if it is merely an outrageous display of hardened cynicism I cannot — I cannot bear it."

"You have interrupted me at the most important point. I was just going to say that now my wife to a certain extent commands my respect; that I acknowledge myself guilty towards her, and in every way her inferior, that I deserve her contempt; that it is only natural, and even legitimate in theory — I may warn you that I too have theories — and I admit that, in theory, it is only natural that Pepa should love another man: as natural as that the birds should build their nests in the branches of trees rather than in the jaws of foxes."

"It never can be natural and legitimate for a married woman to love any man but her husband," said Paoletti very gravely. "What would have been natural and legitimate is that your wife, instead of listening to the addresses of a married man and contributing to the martyrdom of a perfect angel, should have

dedicated to God the affections you have ceased to deserve."

"Mysticism is a figurative fount which cannot satisfy the thirsty. She did not crave to love a phantom but a man. I have reasons for believing that she has loved him from her childhood. In one of our violent quarrels, which used to be of daily occurrence, she said: 'You are not my husband and never have been; my husband is there. . .' and she tapped her forehead. Another time she said: 'Marrying you was a deliberate act of self-degradation.' In short, respected father, at this moment I confess to a grain of respect for the wretched soul who has been my victim. As a woman I do not care a straw for her. She does not appeal to my heart, to my imagination, or to my senses. So far as love goes, I could almost let her go, let her break one tie to form the other; but my pride rebels. Another thing I may tell you is that I hate the man; I have hated him ever since we were at college together; I believe that my aversion and her love have run in parallel grooves till an unlucky moment when they came into collision, and broke out in conflict, — and I must conquer — I must conquer."

"You have only to assert your rights. But this is no concern of mine; I plead not for law but for virtue."

"I am coming to that point. We have here an alliance of virtue and law, and both are on my side," Cimarra went on with increased vehemence. "I am the stronger and she the weaker party; I am the de-

fendant, and they are the criminals. I am protected alike by religion and morality; by God and his laws, by the Church and by public opinion. Nothing, no one, can protect them. The ground on which I stand is solid earth, the best suited to my purposes, desiring as I do to be reconciled to the powers that rule the world, and to become a useful wheel in the social machine. Feeling secure in my position, and upheld both by human Justice, and by what you call divine laws, I intended to prosecute them on legal grounds, to exhaust every means, to worry them out of their lives and give them no peace nor breathing time; to cover them with dishonour, heap disgrace on them . . . to attack them with the code in one hand and the anathemas of the Church in the other. These were my weapons; but, you must know, that my worthy uncles and my respected father-in-law have spent this whole day in concocting a compromise. Oh! my illustrious father-in-law is an eminently practical man, with an intense horror of exaggeration. He is as fond of me as he might be of the toothache. Unfortunately for him, this man, who is all-powerful in society, and who has a right to treat Spaniards as if they were slaves he had bought or could sell, can do nothing to hurt me. The arm of the law, if he used it to attack me, would turn and wound him too."

"And you say that Don Justo Cimarra and Don Pedro Fúcar have been planning a compromise?" said Paoletti, who, in spite of his resolution, was yielding a little to curiosity.

"An amicable separation. — But as yet there is nothing proved, my dear sir. All must depend on our philosopher, geologist, cave-hunter. — Gustavo told me that everything was prepared for their flight, and I believe him — I must confess that I should do the same in their place!"

"So far as I am concerned I can only say that the matter does not interest me in the least," said Paoletti, subduing his curiosity. "You are talking of law-suits, not of a case of conscience."

"I will go on to speak of my wife. You know that I have a daughter?"

"Yes," and again the priest felt the prick of curiosity.

"Monina is my child. Well, *señor cura*, the only being in the world who can rouse my soul to anything like an emotion, the only creature who, now and then, makes me think and feel unlike my habitual self, for whom a smile still lingers in that dark, unfathomed region which we call the soul — for lack of any other name, is my little daughter. I do not know what comes over me; when I was at the point of death in that horrible ship with its cargo of petroleum, everything vanished from my mind but the sense of danger, and in the midst of that danger that little golden head rose up before my eyes. I fancied that I clung to it to save myself in that wretched leaky boat which seemed every moment to be sinking. You will smile at my folly. — I used to play with her, to make her laugh that I might laugh too. . ."

"At last, at last," said Paoletti with satisfaction. "Here is the spark I was looking for."

"No — do not suppose there is any particular virtue in it; it is only that my little fair-haired child — or toy — with her angel's eyes, has a wonderful charm for me. I fancy I love her, and should love her more if I had her more constantly with me. I hear she was near dying of croup. I long to have her in my arms. What do you say to this?"

"I say that there is no soil, however barren, from which no flower can spring."

"This has nothing to do with flowers. — What I want to tell you is that as I passed through New York, I saw, in a shop window, a little toy carriage full of dolls and pulled by a string, and I bought it to bring to her."

Paoletti smiled.

"I see all your pride, your indifference to your wife, your hatred of your rival, the law-suit and possible compromise; I see your atrocious atheism, your passions, your inhuman cynicism, — your love for the child, and the little carriage pulled by a string," — Cimarra had it in his hand. — "But I do not see what I can do in the matter."

"Now we have come to the point, to what, as I said, is urgent. I am most anxious to know what they are plotting. — Is he here to-night? I was told he had some friends to see him. I am perfectly convinced that you know it; my wife is sure to have told you."

"To have told me? I believe the lady has a particular dislike to me."

"You must know through the Condesa de Vera, who is my wife's most intimate friend; she, if I mistake not, is one of your flock."

"I know nothing, and they have told me nothing," said the priest with some asperity. "And even if I knew. . . ."

"Oh! you need not be afraid that in case of their attempting to fly, I should go in for high tragedy, and make a scene. I do not challenge or kill. I am more philosophical than all your philosophers put together."

"I can only repeat that I know nothing and want to know nothing."

"It is impossible that such a man as you should have come to the house two days in succession and not know everything that goes on in it."

"But I am not a friend in this house — I am a foe."

"Then as you cannot satisfy my curiosity," said the intruder sadly, "you cannot help me I suppose?"

"In what?"

"To see the child."

"It is vain to ask me a favour which is altogether out of my sphere. Nothing on earth would induce me to take a step beyond this room. Apply to the servants."

"No one will do a thing for me for fear of Fúcar. My affectionate father-in-law has given strict orders that I am not to be admitted. All the way from the gate I only found one servant who would take a bribe. Even the dogs hate me here."

"Steal in like a thief."

"I am afraid of being seen."

"Go in as a father."

"I cannot, at any rate at this hour."

"Much less can I."

"If the Countess de Vera is here and you say only two words to her — if you only tell her with your usual eloquence what I want, what I wish — she will not refuse you. I solemnly swear to you that I have no evil intention whatever. I only want to give my child three good kisses. . . ."

"*Vade retro.* I do not trust your intentions which may be what you describe them, or may be utterly vile."

"I will not insist. At any rate I have the grace not to be an obstinate beggar. — The only important subject of our interview may be regarded as disposed of. You will forgive my boldness."

"It is forgiven."

"The other question of interest which I proposed to discuss with you, and which can be postponed, is closely connected with what I have been saying. Supposing my wife is subdued by the threat of the law, controls her passion and sends the geologist about his business. . . . In a short time it will be quite easy for you to become Pepa's spiritual director."

"I do not go where I am not bidden."

"Pepa has many friends who are your daughters in the Church, who form, if I may say so, your spiritual family. The Condesa de Vera in particular. . . ."

"Yes, I am her director; she honours me by her friendship."

"Just so. Then if you chose you could be Pepa's. Her lonely life would predispose her to mysticism. The mind of a poor weak woman, when her illusions are past, turns to the altar."

"Well, you may have a really good and honest purpose in suggesting this. If what you desire is that I should interfere to make the best of an unhappy marriage, and snatch back to God two souls that the Devil claims, the idea seems to me a good one. But to that end, you must begin by abjuring your atrocious opinions, and become a sincere Catholic."

"So far as that goes, I have no wish to disturb the general concord. I am most anxious to be reconciled to society, to show my respect for its venerable institutions, to settle down and give rise to no scandals, above all not to set a bad example to the lower orders, who, if they see a man in broad-cloth neglect going to church, think that they may commit robbery and murder. I have no intention of starting afresh with a map in my hand, or of toiling in business to accumulate a fortune for myself. I am sure that I shall get on and that even Fúcar, who thinks himself a little Almighty, will cease to call me a ruffian and even agree at last to make bargains and do business with me. The present generation has a powerful gift of forgetfulness. It is very easy to rehabilitate oneself in a society like ours, a medley of the most dissimilar elements — all bad, and governed by the worst — the love of show. In quite

half of the households of a certain class we see the *ménage à trois;* public administration ought to be called public prevarication; high and low are distinguished by nothing on earth but the different clothes under which they hide their grossly scandalous conduct; politics are a system of pillage; the people are ruined in taxes and enrich themselves by lotteries; justice is the curse of fools and the blessing of the knowing; and if two or three agree to call some puppet a remarkable man, every one believes them. Nothing is easier than to make a robe of honour and put it on, to become a distinguished patriot and public character, and see your portrait on the penny match-boxes. I would undertake, if I gave my mind to it, to make people think I was worthy to be canonized within a couple of years. But I am not prepared to turn bigot just yet. — As to our marriage do not worry yourself with trying to patch that up — it is past remedy; but if she, from an honest instinct, packs off her lover, then make a saint of her, and you will comfort her greatly. I should be glad to see my wife devout, pious and good; I like your edifying folks. Leave me to recover my own footing in society in my own way. What I ask of your goodness and Catholic feeling is that, after you have gained the control of Pepa's mind — without any idea of bringing us together, for which I do not care in the least — you will induce her to allow me to see the child. There would be no need for my coming here; I would rather not, I have always hated Suertebella; but some one could bring her to see me — you,

for instance. Let us say she should come and dine with me twice a week, or once a week: nothing more than that."

"What depths of utter apathy!" exclaimed Paoletti with intense bitterness. "I have seen many men of such temper in society in Spain; but you, with your detestable pessimism, could give them points and beat them all."

"I at any rate say what I mean."

"The long and short of it is, Señor Cimarra, that you are in my eyes so abominable that I cannot see my way to gratifying the only legitimate desire which lurks, almost invisible, in the blackness and barrenness of your soul. Do not count upon me for anything. If your wife repents and dismisses her lover, and if I am called in — which is no doubt, very possible — to direct her conscience, my first task will be to cure her of her sinful griefs; and then I will turn her thoughts to God, who is the only refuge of those poor women who have been so rash as to love unworthy men. What joy for me to win a fresh battle against Satan. You — you do not exist, you are nothing to me! Do not keep me any longer; let me return to watch by the beloved dead."

"I shall not go into the chapel; I have a horror of dead people. Pardon me for having disturbed you, reverend Father."

"I will not neglect to pray for you."

"I do not refuse — on the contrary, I thank you."

"I look forward to the day of your repentance."

"Thank you; you are most kind. It is more than I deserve. Good-bye, a thousand apologies."

The little priest went softly away; his heavy steps died away in the passage which led to the chapel. Cimarra went out the same way; but he went down the steps and not into the little sanctuary where the illumination of mortuary torches filled him with more dread than respect. He crossed the deserted park, shrinking into the shadow of the trees when, now and again, he heard footsteps. Every now and then he felt his pocket to be sure that he had not lost the toy for Monina.

Presently, in the course of his nocturnal expedition, he saw Fúcar's carriage drive in at the gates, and from his safe distance he addressed him in thought rather than in words: "Ah! my friend, what eyes I caught you making this afternoon in the street at the fair American who came with me from the States. Jupiter! you wished she was for you I'll wager."

He saw the marquis get out of the carriage with another man, and muttered to himself: "My uncle is with him! What is up I wonder. Oh! dread curiosity! Why do you torment me as if you were jealousy?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THREE AGAINST TWO.

THE next evening, at the hour fixed by Don Pedro, Leon made his way to Pepa's sitting-room. She was there with her father and a third person. Monina, who had been dancing and skipping round her mother, was condemned to retire to bed; a banishment involving floods of tears, but against which there is no appeal for the little ones when their elders have business to discuss. The marquis half-buried in a deep arm-chair, with his fat chin resting on his shirt front, his lips sticking out as if too much flesh had gone to the making of his face, his brows knit under a labyrinth of wrinkles — the scars, as it were, won in a hundred fights against "all exaggeration," was an impressive personage. The third of the trio was an old man with white hair, a dry thin face, and excessively short-sighted, to judge from the strong concavity of his gold-mounted spectacles which were astride on a nose that, for size and curve, was more like a pelican's bill than anything else in creation. His manners had the gravity of a student mixed with the patriarchal frankness of a man of good birth. They were all in mourning, and the grief of Pepa's heart overflowed her eyes.

"Here he is," said Don Pedro taking his daughter's hand caressingly.

"So I see," said Pepa looking up at Leon, and then looking away. "And now he is to repeat what my father told me, and I would not believe."

"My dearest child," said Fúcar, "this is a case of honour, of duty, of social decency, of morality — both in the true and in the more customary sense. Consider. — You cannot have everything you want."

"I know it, I know it," murmured Pepa, fixing a stony gaze on the table-cloth before her.

"Much as it costs me," said Leon, feeling that brevity was most to the purpose. "I must declare that I see it to be an inexorable duty to part from the woman I love, and give up every hope of ever making her mine."

No one said a word in reply. Pepa let her head drop on her father's shoulder and closed her eyes. Leon took one of her hands, which she passively surrendered, and said with much feeling:

"It is the greatness of a crisis that tests greatness of soul."

Again there was a pause; then Don Pedro, swallowing half his words and twisting his mouth nervously, began as follows:

"And I declare that we have come to this peaceable and happy compromise on the strength of an agreement concluded between Don Justo Cimarra and myself, by which my respected friend undertakes that

his nephew will withdraw his action. . ." Don Pedro fairly choked. Don Justo came to the rescue.

"And renounce the rights he might legally assert."

"Just so, he renounces all use of the weapon that the law places within his reach, on condition that he, who by every theory of law, morality, and religion is out of place in this miserable conjunction of three persons where there should be but two, shall disappear completely. — My dear friend," he went on, turning to Leon with a conciliatory smile, "you, by retiring from a position untenable by law and morality — impossible, in fact, but for the corruption and laxity of modern society — you have saved us from a disgraceful scandal. I can only thank you with all my heart, and. . ."

Again Don Pedro cast an appealing glance at his friend.

"The circumstances of the case," Don Justo went on emphasizing his speech with his forefinger, "are exceptional. For my part, I am thankful that the quarrel should be made up. I was the first to advise my nephew to withdraw from it, if we could only insure the permanent absence of this gentleman. . ." and the finger pointed at Leen. "But as the circumstances of the case are so exceptional — I must repeat it — and as the very small moral worth of my nephew himself would seem to justify that rebellion against his authority which we are anxious to avert. . ." and the finger pointed in mute accusation to Pepa. "I was, as I say, the first to advise the concessions demanded by this

gentleman. . ." again the finger indicated Leon, "and which, I admit, are quite in the spirit of true judicial prudence. In view, then, of all these facts I thought it well to draw up in concert with my friend here. . ." the finger after wavering like the needle of a compass turned to the marquis — "the articles of an honourable peace, I pledged my word of honour that my nephew should accept the condition proposed by Señor Don Leon, and fulfil his part of the compact."

The worthy gentleman, who paused now and then in his speech to give it greater emphasis, here stopped for a moment, and then went on:

"The condition laid down by this gentleman, and agreed to, by proxy, by what I am obliged to term the innocent party — in the eyes of the law — is that this lady shall live with her father and her daughter, here at Suertebella; and that my nephew shall never, under any pretence, cross the boundary line of the estate, thus effecting a separation which, without being hostile, shall be absolute and complete."

"And everything has been settled in a satisfactory manner," said Don Pedro, relaxing his frown and stroking his daughter's hair with his heavy hand, while she said not a word, and did not even open her eyes. "Time, time," he said, "time is the remedy for all things. — Do you not think so, Leon?"

"I, for my part," said Leon, "do not expect time to give me what it has not got to bestow. I hate to forget — it is the death of the heart. My feelings will be the same that they are now to my dying day — but

at a distance, where I can never be troubled by a wretch whom I have always despised, and always shall despise. I have spent my life in the pursuit of an ideal — the ideal Christian family: the centre of peace and corner-stone of virtue; the stepping-stone to moral perfection; the fount in which each and all may be baptised and purified. Such a home is an education; it compels us to grow to a higher standard and rubs off the asperities of our nature, giving us the most precious lessons by placing in our care the men of the future, that we may train them from the cradle to years of discretion. — And all this has been, and must ever be, to me no more than a dream. Two women have crossed my path, Religion gave me the first, and religion, wrongly understood, tore her from me. The second would have given me herself — gave me her heart and soul; and I took the gift; but the law deprives me of it, and I have no choice but to resign it. All my attempts to achieve the lovely reality will be no less ill-fated. Society threw this woman into the arms of another man, and if I claim her I condemn her and myself to a life of unqualified disgrace, on a level with the basest of those I most abhor. Nay, and our dishonour becomes a legacy to innocent creatures, guiltless of the errors committed before they were born, but nevertheless coming nameless and dishonoured into the world."

He kissed Pepa's hand which she had left in his, and then went on:

"The presence of these two persons, who will be

scandalized, no doubt, by my words, shall not prevent my expressing my feelings. — To me, this woman is mine, mine by the divine law of love. I, radical as I am, bow to this law of the heart; but when I wish to put these anarchical views into practice, I tremble and dare not. The fierce rebellion lingers in my soul and cannot venture forth. Those who cannot transform the world and uproot its errors, must respect them. Those who cannot see the mysterious limit-line between legality and iniquity, must yield to the law with the patience of slaves. Those whose souls rise with cries and struggles in a revolt which seems legitimate, are nevertheless incompetent to place a sounder constitution in the place of that which crushes them, and can only suffer in silence."

"We are all slaves to the laws of the age we live in," said Don Justo sternly.

"That is true," Leon said; he was evidently speaking for Pepa's benefit alone. "Our spirits are but a part of the spirit that made those laws; we are so far responsible for their defects that we must accept the consequences. If every one who felt injured by the machine in which we move — the majority in lazy indifference — if the sufferers, I say, were to set to work to alter it and could not repair it, what a world this would become! We must submit to be torn and mangled, secretly bewailing our misery, and only wishing we could live to see new machinery at work. But even that, I have no doubt, would hurt some one, since every improvement in one phase of human life brings

some fresh form of suffering. Life is an aspiration — a thirst which revives as soon as it is quenched. If we could conceive of immortality under no other aspect, we could imagine it as consisting in seeing ourselves constantly under the dominion of—whether in small actions or in great ones — and constantly enchanted by the lovely vision of that distant horizon we call perfection. — If you, poor soul, could only know how I have fought with myself since we last talked together. I reconsidered every impossible alternative. It would be so easy to escape from this maze by simply following the impulse of my heart, and shielding myself behind theoretical and selfish arguments which no one but myself could follow and which even I could not distinctly marshall. — You were ready to come, the carriage was waiting, all the means of flight were ready, there was not an obstacle in sight and we could have afforded to think lightly of the opinion of society. — To be off and happy in some distant land! How easy and pleasant it seemed! You — not my wife — I your lover; both living in the practice of social anarchy, our illicit connection an outrage on the noblest and most necessary institution of human society; I haunted by a ghost, and you by a living man, who on every possible occasion would proclaim and urge his rights; neither of us having any claims against others while the whole world would have claims against us. Your daughter, again, growing up with this horrible example before her innocent eyes; and on what moral ground could you damn me if one day she

felt inclined to become the mistress of the first man who fell in love with her? When once we break the bounds, we have no choice but to cast off all the ties that give order and stability to the world. — Yes, I thought over everything that could be said on either side. Then I considered whether I could not stay here, and soothe my anxieties with the satisfaction of being near you, even though I should neither see you nor speak to you. But that again cannot be. If I stay within reach of you, some time or other, almost without intending it, we should be certain to meet. Then that man I loathe would interfere — I should be unable to control my hatred, and I know, I feel, it would end in bloodshed. If I do not go away — far away, and soon — I know how that baleful impulse would grow stronger in me; it is like some hideous bidding to kill. Under my calmer reason turbid springs seethe in my soul, surging up to sweep away every obstacle. There is that within me which urges me to violence and rebellion; but I lack courage, for I reflect that nothing permanent, right, or moral, can be built up on anarchy or on blood. I take refuge in my conscience, and I have decided to go. I go to save your honour and the happiness of your child."

Pepa did not lift her head nor open her eyes and she spoke with bitter despair.

"I am incapable of argument; I seek one, but in vain; I look into my soul and I find nothing but love."

Then she slowly raised herself and opened her hot

and aching eyes; but she looked at no one as she added:

"I am punished. When I see that the fetters which link me to a villain cannot be broken, I cannot help remembering that the fault is all my own. — Yes, mine; for in a fit of jealous pique I bound myself for life to a worthless wretch. I flung myself into evil; degrading myself and my father, and turning marriage into a wicked and hideous farce. — Why had I no patience? I rushed into marriage with a strange impulse towards martyrdom. It was the mad vanity of anguish which seeks to add to its tortures. — Then, when you thought I was free, why did you seek me? We both made a cruel mistake in binding ourselves with intolerable bonds. As soon as you were free, I was suddenly caught again, and in that fatal pillory; but I hoped some chivalrous hand might dash it to pieces."

"There was no way but bloodshed," Leon said hastily.

Pepa made no answer.

"I am the victim," she exclaimed after a painful silence. "And I cannot bear to die — it is grief and punishment. I hate to be sacrificed; it is misery, utter misery, even if it is right and just — even if I deserve it. Here, before me, I see two respectable men — my father and a judge. Well, before them, and before you. — The man I claim. . ." And she fixed her eyes on Leon's with an indescribable expression of love and reproach; she gasped for air and hardly seemed to have breath enough to speak: "You are mine — and before

you all three I declare that this desertion. . ." she burst into tears and added feebly: "is cowardly."

Don Justo lifted up his calm persuasive voice.

"Try," he said, "to see the immediate details in their true proportions, and fix your thoughts on broad and eternal facts. The soul may grow to the dignity of its sorrows and borrow from them a sort of majesty to rule the spirit."

"True," said Leon, sadly. "Our very wounds reveal a secret and ineffable fount of compensation. Pepa — my darling, my heart's wife — wife, I say, by an unwritten law on which we may not act, which can never be of any avail; but which lurks in my soul like the germ of truth, a holy seed buried in the depths of being. — Look into your soul and you will see yourself nobler and more worthy in your sorrow than in the satisfaction of your passion. Though we are conquered and humiliated by the crushing necessity that parts us — a mysterious mixture of something dignified and venerable with iniquity and injustice, a horrible and unnatural coalition, we may enjoy the noblest form of triumph. You are religious; and I believe in the immortality of the soul, in eternal justice, in final perfection: a brief creed but a grand and firm one. We are conquered; we are victims and martyrs. But Hope has no limits. It is a grace which links us to the unknown and calls to us from afar, beautifying life and giving us strength to stand firm and walk onward. We will not be so criminal as to cut the thread which guides us forward to a goal which, though remote, is

not invisible to eyes that are not bound by an evil conscience. Conquer despair, rise superior to it; resign yourself, and hope."

"Hope? Have I not said that I should die hoping?" said Pepa bitterly, recurring to an old idea. "It is my punishment; my heart told me long since that its name was Hope. And if I die?"

"It matters not."

"It matters not?" she said, for Leon's fervent spirituality did not meet her mood. He would have said more, but he was at an end of his arguments, and the suggestions of consolation and hope with which he tried to do battle were, he saw, of no more avail than weapons which break in the hand in the heat of a fray. He knew not what to say. Feeling, which can sometimes be quelled by reason, and which he had studiously endeavoured to subdue and control, rose in revolt, snatched up its despotic sceptre and asserted its dominion. He rose.

"Now — so soon?" said Pepa rushing into his arms with a sudden overflow of passion.

"Heaven forgive me!" cried Leon choked with emotion. "With my wretched arguments, I am belabouring myself with my own logic. It is a horrible farce a mockery of morality and cannot bind me."

Pepa clasped her hands as if in prayer and preparing for death, and Leon was on the point of uttering some wildly subversive ideas which came boiling from his heart like the lava from a volcano, when the maid

rushed in who had charge of Monina. She was pale and trembling.

"What is the matter?" said the marquis.

"The man — there!"

"Who?"

"A man. He came in suddenly — he is kissing the child."

"It is he!" exclaimed Fúcar much agitated.

"He!"

"But it was agreed that he was not to come!"

"He — he is here?" cried Leon, suddenly losing logic, reason, prudence and self-command, and flaring up in frenzy. "Let him dare to come in! Does he presume to desecrate these walls? I am glad to meet him here — I will tear him limb from limb like a foul beast!"

He turned to the door, where a man was standing. Pepa, with a piercing shriek, fell senseless. Don Pedro threw his strong arms round Leon to hold him back, and the older gentleman rushed forward indignantly to check his nephew's further advance.

"For mercy's sake! — in the name of all the Saints!" exclaimed Don Pedro.

"Stand back!" said Don Justo. "Do not stir a step forward."

"What business have you here?" cried Leon with contemptuous insolence.

"Go," said the magistrate. "Have you forgotten our agreement?"

"No. The agreement is not yet in force," replied

Cimarra, not moving an inch, and fixing his eyes on Leon with the glare of a wild tiger. "I came to see my little girl for the last time. I will not contravene the compromise, if others adhere to it. I have no desire to come here unless you are here."

"I entreat you to go away," said Don Pedro to Leon.

"He must go first."

But the gloomy, surly figure in the door-way made no sign of moving.

"He must go first," echoed Cimarra.

"Yes — I first — wretch! — So it must be," said Leon.

Meanwhile Don Pedro and a maid had lifted Pepa and carried her to a sofa.

"You first," Federico insisted, his cynicism yielding for a moment to an impulse of real dignity. "If not, I. . ."

"Nay; I will go first," said Leon bitterly. "It is but right."

He went up to the senseless form lying pale and dumb on the sofa, and gazed at her for a moment; he looked up at Cimarra, and bending over Pepa, kissed her cheek with tender passion. Then, fixing his eyes on her husband, he said:

"Bully! Thus I take leave of the woman you claim as your wife. If it is a crime, kill me; you have a right to do so. — Have you a weapon?"

"Yes," said Federico sullenly, and putting his hand into his breast-pocket. It seemed as though a spark of

honour, vigour and dignity had suddenly flashed into being in this abject creature — a corpse returned from the grave — as the will-o'-the-wisp suddenly flickers up from a foul morass. He stood face to face with his foe, a pistol in his hand, with a dull roar in his voice, and a sinister light in his eye. Leon waited calmly. But Don Pedro and his friend seized Federico and held his arms. After a violent struggle, they succeeded in pulling him back; Leon remained standing with his arms folded, in the middle of the room.

"Leave the house!" cried Don Justo to his nephew.

"I will answer for the other," said Don Pedro.

Don Justo dragged Federico away, not allowing him to pause an instant till he was fairly out of the house.

Leon sadly but steadily quitted the room by the other door. Fúcar accompanied him as far as the Chinese room, where he left him, stretched like a lifeless body on a divan.

"Go," he said, "leave us, and put an end to this misery." And he went back to his daughter.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE END.

LEON lay there a long time, unconscious of the flight of time. His scattered faculties slowly recovered their power of calmly contemplating the situation, though he found no peace. He rose to leave the house, and wandered vaguely from one room to another, seeking his way to the hall. When at length he reached it, he thought he heard strange voices, and stood still to listen; then, turning away, he descended a flight of back stairs that led to the basement floor, and tried to find his way out into the garden. After going in and out for some time in the endless and tortuous corridors of the servant's premises, he saw a door which he opened.

All the blood in his body rushed in a cold tide to his heart and gave him a shock like a sudden fall, as he found himself in the chapel, lighted up by innumerable flambeaux. He took off his hat and gazed with open eyes. He was too much startled to do anything for some time but stand motionless at the door; he hardly seemed to breathe, and his bewildered mind was aware only of a mountain of light, for so it appeared to him: a mass of ruddy slender flames which stretched their quivering tongues to the very roof, rising from the

melting wax that dropped in yellow streams. In the midst, as a base to this blazing pyramid, a funereal object filled, as it were the throne of honour; white drapery and two marble hands were all that could be distinguished.

It needed all his manly courage to carry him nearer. Before stepping forward he glanced round him. No one was there; he could not hear a sound, not even a living breath, was audible; the cold remains of a human being, robed in the garments of a saintly death, seemed guarded by silence. The statue of a pallid youth stood upon the altar; his eyes, painted like life, shone across the chapel, to watch all who entered, and say: "Beware! Touch her not!"

Leon advanced slowly, treading softly that he might not hear the sound of his own steps. Reverence, the sanctity of the spot, his agonising hesitancy between the wish to approach and the instinct to withdraw, caused him to go through half a dozen separate states of mind in the course of the twenty steps between the door and the altar: anxiety and curiosity, nay fear—or superstition. He had time to assure himself that it was awe that held him back, and the audacious curiosity of that very awe which urged him forward.

He saw her. There she lay, before him, on the ground, and at the very threshold, as it were, of the realm where her immortal soul might find complete repose. Her spirit, selfish rather than generous, had already passed, with a sigh perhaps of surprise and awe, into the unknown land where love is the only wisdom, and

where good and evil are more exactly appreciated and understood.

After once looking at her, and the first shock of reverence and pain over, he remained gazing thus; hearing the throbbing in his own temples and the rush of the blood in his veins, like the roar of an internal tide.

She was covered with a white robe, laid over her limbs by pious friends, with severe purity. Ample folds lay in straight lines from her neck to her feet, broken only by the marble hands which held a crucifix. A semi-transparent veil was over her face, neither concealing it nor too plainly revealing the outline, but letting it be seen vaguely, remotely as it were, through a mist of clouds, like the image that survives from a dream in eyes but half-awake. He would have liked to see more clearly what remained of her unequalled beauty, which, under the hand of death, was fading like some withered violet-tinted flower. In that face, blind and dead as it was, there was still some trace of expression. Leon found himself gazing into the depths of that vacant mystery, made deeper by the clouds of gauze, and recognised the look he had last seen on her features — a look less of love than of irony.

His brain was busy with all the solemn thoughts that besiege a man in the great crises of life: he reflected on the wide distance that divides us from true happiness — a distance that mind cannot measure, and that man has no means of shortening. Suddenly his meditations were interrupted by a commonplace and intrusive sound — a cough. He looked round. He

and the dead were not alone. In a corner of the chapel sat a watcher. It was the little priest, seated on a bench with his eyes fixed on his prayer-book. Leon could not help admiring the fidelity of the spiritual friend who, having been her guide during life, had constituted himself her guardian in death. Without lifting his head, the Italian raised his eyes and looked for a few seconds at Leon, fixedly — very fixedly. Then he looked down again and went on reading. This simple, calm drooping of the eyes was expressive of the most sovereign contempt imaginable. Paoletti murmured on, as though not a soul were present: "*Ego sum vermis et non homo, opprobium hominum et abjectio plebis.*"

Why was it that, as he left the chapel — no less reverently than he had entered it — Leon felt in his soul a soothing sense of consolation? — He had seen, face to face the worst terrors of the moral and physical world, and the struggle to which the contemplation had given rise had left his soul surrounded by melancholy ruins. *Impavidum ferient ruinae*, as a heathen said! But though he was crushed, alone, exiled and injustly judged, what could he care while his conscience was free in the sunshine that brightens it when it is sure of having acted rightly.

On returning to his empty house he found his servant busy packing in obedience to his orders given a few hours since. The man expressed great joy at see-

ing him, and when Leon enquired as to the cause of his eager satisfaction, the faithful fellow replied:

"At the Señora Marquesa's, and in all the houses where you are known, they said you would be brought home with a bullet through your brains to-night. They were so sure of it that I could not help crying."

Leon smiled sadly.

"And so, when I came in to pack, the first thing I did was to hide your pistols, in case you should kill yourself here if you had not done it before."

"Where have you put them? Are they loaded?" said Leon hastily.

"Oh! Master, do not kill yourself!" cried the terrified man.

"Nay, be easy, my friend," said Leon, pointing to his forehead. "This brain is not bent on suicide. — As to the pistols, if they are loaded you had better drop them into the street, for the first fool to experiment upon."

"Throw them away! They are beauties!"

"Well, keep them yourself then; keep them till you marry."

"You forget, Sir; I am married."

"Well then, till you are a widower."

"*From Marqués de Fúcar to Marqués de Onésimo.*

"MADRID, December 1st.

"Before leaving London via Hamburg to purchase

the twenty bales of tobacco, sell all the Rio Tinto shares, and the foreign consols. Buy at once Paris Gas, and Spanish *crédit mobilier*. The loan — the third State loan this year — is getting on capitally. I want an investment here to enable me to propose to the Government to pay off part of the foreign coupons to English holders, which will promote the affair here very effectually; the profits I anticipate from this are incalculable. For everything else act on my instructions of November 23rd. Do not forget my orders for taking every advantage of the Hamburg tobacco merchants; no backwardness; business is good, so you need not run up to extravagant prices.

"My daughter keeps well. Very sad, very lonely, in fairly good health, resigned and calm. She never leaves Suertebella. Mona, sweeter every day, sends you three kisses. The wretch holds to his bargain and never molests us. He has turned stock-broker, and they tell me he watches the market with great patience and judgment, and is making a huge fortune. He is clever enough, there is no doubt of that.

"I expect you to eat your Christmas dinner at Suertebella.

"Yours as ever,

"P. FUCAR.

"P. S. If you should come across that queer fellow give him my kind regards — but only mine."

THE END.

ADVERTISEMENTS

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"The scene is laid in Arezzo in the Val di Chiana. The town is small, with wide, clean, small, and well-paved streets, possesses many celebrated works of art, has a bishop, two inns, and a café, and women who are passing fair. Among the women is Fiordalisa, the daughter of the painter Jacopo, a disciple of the school of Taddeo Gaddi. Ever since she had come with her father from Florence, where she was born, to live at Arezzo, she has been acknowledged as a peerless beauty. These are the warm colors, borrowed from the world about him, in which the Italian novelist paints her:

"'Good God! how beautiful she looked there, twice . . . with her eyes cast down, and her head and throat jealously guarded by a veil of white silk flowing over her shoulders. Dressed simply in a robe of some half-woollen, half-silken stuff, made with loose sleeves, and large folds descending gracefully from her hips: a white kerchief just covering the nape of her neck, but no other trimming or superfluous adornment to disguise the curves of her perfect form, Madonna Fiordalisa seemed a very miracle of grace and beauty. The head crowned with chestnut tresses, and the profile of that delicately-tinted face, both displayed such purity of outline, combined with such sweetness of expression, that it seemed to Spinello that he had never before beheld anything to compare with them.'"—*Literary World, Boston.*

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He had started in live in extreme poverty but with a great love in his heart; and the goal he had set before his eyes was wealth and distinction, but still for the sake of love. Now, wealth and distinction were his — but the love he had lost on the way.

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